THE SHADOW OF A DREAM

W. D. Howells.

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THE SHADOW OF A DREAM

A STORY

BY

W. D. HOWELLS

AUTHOR OF "APRIL HOPES" "ANNIE KILBURN"
"A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES" ETC.

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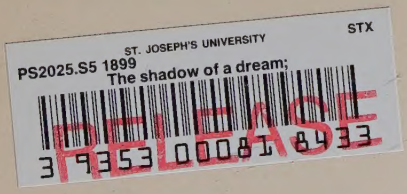

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
1899

122220

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Electrotyped by David Douglas, Edinburgh.

THE SHADOW OF A DREAM.

PART FIRST.—FAULKNER.

I.

DOUGLAS FAULKNER was of a type once commoner in the West than now, I fancy. In fact, many of the circumstances that tended to shape such a character, with the conditions that repressed and the conditions that evolved it, have changed so vastly that they may almost be said not to exist any longer.

He was a lawyer, with a high ideal of professional honour, and in his personal relations he was known to be almost fantastically delicate, generous, and faithful. At the same time he was a "practical" politician; he adhered to his party in all its measures; he rose rapidly to be a leader in it, and was an unscrupulous manager of caucuses and conventions. For a while he was editor of the party

organ in his city, and he wrote caustic articles for it which were rather in the line of his political than his personal morality. This employment was supposed to be more congenial than his profession to the literary taste for which he had a large repute among his more unliterary acquaintance. They said that Faulkner could have been an author if he had chosen, and they implied that this was not worth while with a man who could be something in law and politics. Their belief had followed him from Muskingum University, where he was graduated with distinction in letters and forensics. The school was not then on so grand a scale as its name, and a little of the humanities might have gone a long way in it; but Faulkner was really a lover of books, and a reader of them, whether he could ever have been a writer of them or not; and he kept up his habit of reading after he entered active life.

It was during his editorial phase that I came from the country to be a writer on the opposition newspaper in his city, and something I did caught his fancy: some sketch of the sort I was always trying at, or some pert criticism, or some flippant satire of his party friends. He came to see me, and asked me

to his house, for a talk, he said, about literature; and when I went I chose to find him not very modern in his preferences. He wanted to talk to me about Byron and Shelley, Scott and Cooper, Lamartine and Schiller, Irving and Goldsmith, when I was full of Tennyson and Heine, Emerson and Lowell, George Eliot and Hawthorne and Thackeray; and he rather bored me, showing me fine editions of his favourites. I was surprised to learn that he was only a few years older than myself: he had filled my mind so long as a politician that I had supposed him a veteran of thirty, at least, and he proved to be not more than twenty-six. Still, as I was only twenty-two I paid him the homage of a younger man, but I remember deciding that he was something of a sentimentalist. He seemed anxious to account for himself in his public character, so out of keeping with the other lives he led; he said he was sorry that his mother (with whom he lived in her widowhood) was out of town; she was the inspiration of all his love of literature, he said; and would have been so glad to see me. I was flattered, for the Faulkners were of the first social importance; they were of Virginian extraction. From his library he took me into what

he called his den, and introduced me to a friend of his who sat smoking in a corner, and whom I saw to be a tall young Episcopal clergyman when he stood up. The night was very hot; Faulkner had in some claret punch, and the Rev. Mr. Nevil drank with us. He did not talk much, and I perceived that he was the matter-of-fact partner in a friendship which was very romantic on Faulkner's side, and which appeared to date back to their college days. That was now a good while ago, but they seemed to be in the habit of meeting often, and to have kept up their friendship in all its first fervour. Mr. Nevil was very handsome, with a regular face, and a bloom on it quite girlishly peachy, and very pure, still, earnest blue eyes. He looked physically and spiritually wholesome; but Faulkner certainly did not look wholesome in the matter of his complexion at least. It was pale, with a sort of smokiness, and his black, straight hair strung down in points over his forehead; his beautiful dark eyes were restlessly brilliant; he stooped a little, and he was, as they say in the West, loose-hung. I noticed his hands, long, nervous, with fingers that trembled, as he rested their tips, a little yellowed from his cigar, on a book.

It was a volume of De Quincey, on whom we all came together in literature, and we happened to talk especially of his essay on Kant, and of the dreams which afflicted the philosopher's old age, and which no doubt De Quincey picturesquely makes the most of. Then we began to tell our own dreams, the ghastlier ones; and Faulkner said he sometimes had dreams, humiliating, disgraceful, loathsome, that followed him far into the next day with a sense of actual occurrence. He was very vivid about them, and in spite of the want of modernity in his literary preferences, I began to think he might really have been a writer. He said that sometimes he did not see why we should not attribute such dreams to the Evil One, who might have easier access to a man in the helplessness of sleep; but Nevil agreed with me that they were more likely to come from a late supper. Faulkner submitted, but he said they were a real affliction, and their persistence in a man's waking thoughts might almost influence his life.

When I took my leave he followed me to his gate, in his bare head and slippers; it was moonlight, and he walked a long way homeward with me. We led

a very simple life in our little city then, and a man might go bareheaded and slipper-footed about its streets at night as much as he liked. Now and then we met a policeman, and Faulkner nodded, with the facile "Ah, Tommy!" or "Hello, Mike!" of a man inside politics. I told him I envied him his ability to mingle with the people in that way, and he said it was not worth while.

"You are on the right track, and I hope you 'll stick to it. We ought to have some Western authors; the West 's ripe for it. I used to have the conceit to think I could have done something myself in literature, if I 'd kept on after I left college."

I murmured some civilities to the effect that this was what all his friends thought.

"Well, it 's too late, now," he said, "if ever it was early enough. I was foredoomed to the law; my father wouldn't hear of anything else, and I don't know that I blame him. I might have made a spoon, but I should certainly have spoiled a horn. A man generally does what he 's fit for. Now there 's Nevil—— Don't you like Nevil?"

I said, "Very much," though really I had not thought it very seemly for a clergyman to smoke,

and drink claret-punch: I was very severe in those days.

Faulkner went on: "Nevil's an instance, a perfect case in point. If ever there was a human creature born into the world to do just the work he *is* doing, it's Nevil. I can't tell you how much that fellow has been to me, March!" This was the second time we had met; but Faulkner was already on terms of comradery with me; he was the kind of man who could hold no middle course; he must stand haughtily aloof, or he must take you to his heart. As he spoke, he put his long arm across my shoulders, and kept it there while we walked. "I was inclined to be pretty wild in college, and I had got to running very free when I first stumbled against Jim Nevil. He was standing up as tall and straight morally as he does physically, but he managed to meet me on my own level without seeming to stoop to it. He was ordained of God, then, and his life had a message for every one; for me it seemed to have a special message, and what he did for me was what he lived more than what he said. He talked to me, of course, but it was his example that saved me. You must know Nevil.

Yes, he's a noble fellow, and you can't have any true conception of friendship till you *have* known him. Just *see* that moon!" Faulkner stopped abruptly, and threw up his head.

The perfect orb seemed to swim in the perfect blue. The words began to breathe themselves from my lips—

"'The moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare'"

and he responded as if it were the strain of a litany—

"'Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair;'"

and I spoke—

"'The sunshine is a glorious birth;'"

and he responded again—

"'But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath passed a glory from the earth.'"

His voice broke in the last line and faded into a tremulous whisper. It was the youth in both of us, smitten to ecstasy by the beauty of the scene, and pouring itself out in the modulations of that divine stop, as if it had been the rapture of one soul.

He took his arm from my shoulders, and turned

about without any ceremony of adieu, and walked away, head down, with shuffling, slippered feet.

We met several times, very pleasantly, and with increased liking. Then he took offence, as capricious as his former fancy, at something I wrote, and sent me an angry note, which I answered in kind. Not long afterward I went abroad on a little money I had saved up, and when I came home, I married, and by an ironical chance found myself, with my æsthetic tastes, my literary ambition, and my journalistic experience, settled in the insurance business at Boston. I did not revisit the West, but I learned by letters that our dear little city out there had become a formidable railroad centre; everybody had made or lost money, and Faulkner had become very rich through the real estate which had long kept him land-poor. One day I got a newspaper addressed in his handwriting, which brought me the news of his marriage. The name of the lady struck me as almost factitiously pretty, and I could well imagine Faulkner provisionally falling in love with her because she was called Hermia Winter. The half-column account of the wedding described the Rev. James Nevil as "officiating"; and something in the

noisy and bragging tone of the reporter in dealing with this important society event disadvantaged the people concerned in my mind. I chose to regard it all as cruder and louder than anything I remembered of the place in old days; but my wife said that it was characteristically Western, and that probably it had always been like that out there; only I had not felt it while I was in it, though, as she said, I was not of it.

She was a Bostonian herself, and it was useless to appeal to the society journalism of her own city in proof of the prevalence of that sort of vulgarity everywhere. She laughed at the name Hermia, and said it sounded made-up, and that she had no doubt the girl's name was Hannah. I thought I had my revenge afterward when a friend wrote me about the marriage, which was a surprise to everybody; for it had always been supposed that Faulkner was going to marry the beautiful and brilliant Miss Ludlow, long, perhaps too long, the belle of the place. The lady whom he had chosen was the daughter of a New England family, who had lived just out of town in my time and had never been in society. She was a teacher in Bell's Institute, and Faulkner met her there on one of his business visits as trustee. She

was a very cultivated girl, though; and they were going abroad for their wedding journey. My correspondent had a special message from Faulkner for me, delivered on his wedding night. He remembered me among the people he would have liked to have there; he was sorry for our little quarrel, and was to blame for it; he was coming home by way of Boston, and was going to look me up.

My wife said, Well, he seemed a nice fellow; but it only showed how any sort of New England girl could go out there and pick up the best. For the rest, she hoped they would not hurry home on my account; and if all my Western friends, with their free ideas of hospitality, were going to call on me, there would be no end to it. It was the jealousy of her husband's past every good wife feels that spoke; but long before I met Faulkner again we had both forgotten all about him.

II.

One day seven or eight years later, when I was coming up from Lynn, where we had board for a few weeks' outing in August, I fell in with Dr. Wingate, the nervous specialist. We were members of the same dining club, and were supposed to meet every month; we really met once or twice during the winter, but then it was a great pleasure to me, and I tried always to get a place next him at table. I found in him, as I think one finds in most intelligent physicians, a sympathy for human suffering unclouded by sentiment, and a knowledge of human nature at once vast and accurate, which fascinated me far more than any forays of the imagination in that difficult region. Like physicians everywhere, he was less local in his feelings and interests than men of other professions; and I was able better to overcome with him that sense of being a foreigner, and in some sort on sufferance, which embarrassed

me (quite needlessly, I dare say) with some of my commensals: lawyers, ministers, brokers, and politicians. I had a sort of affection for him; I never saw him, with the sunny, simple-hearted, boyish smile he had, without feeling glad; and it seemed to me that he liked me, too. His kindly presence must have gone a long way with his patients, whose fluttering sensibilities would hang upon his cheery strength as upon one of the main chances of life.

We rather rushed together to shake hands, and each asked how the other happened to be there at that hour in the morning. I explained my presence, and he said, as if it were some sort of coincidence: "You don't say so! Why, I've got a patient over at Swampscott, who says he knows you. A man named Faulkner."

I repeated, "Faulkner?" In the course of travel and business I had met so many people that I forgave myself for not distinguishing them very sharply by name, at once.

"He says he used to know you in your demi-semi-literary days, and he rather seemed to think you must be concealing a reputation for a poet, when

I told him you were in the insurance business, and I only knew of your literary tastes. He 's a Western man, and he met you out there."

"Oh!" said I. "*Douglas* Faulkner!" And now it was my turn to say, "*You* don't say so! Why of course! Is it possible!" and I lost myself in a cloud of silent reminiscences and associations, to come out presently with the question, "What in the world is he doing at Swampscott?"

The doctor looked serious; and then he looked keenly at me. "Were you and he great friends?"

"Well, we were not sworn brothers exactly. We were writers on rival newspapers; but I rather liked him. Yes, there was something charming to me about him; something good and sweet. I haven't met him, though, for ten years."

"He seemed to be rather fond of you. He said he wished I would tell you to come and see him, the next time I met you. Odd you should turn up there in the station!" By this time we were in the train, on our way to Boston.

"I will," I said, and I hesitated to add, "I hope there 's nothing serious the matter?"

The doctor hesitated too. "Well, he 's a pretty sick man. There 's no reason I shouldn't tell you.

He's badly run down; and—I don't like the way his heart behaves."

"Oh, I'm sorry——"

"He had just got home from Europe, and was on his way to the mountains when he came to see me in Boston, and I sent him to the seaside. I came down last night—it's the beginning of my vacation—to see him, and spent the night there. He's got the Mallows place—nice old place. Do you know his wife?"

"No; he married after I came East. What sort of person is she?" I asked.

I remembered my talk with my wife about her and her name, and I felt that it was really a triumph for me when the doctor said: "Well, she's an exquisite creature. One of the most beautiful women I ever saw, and one of the most interesting. Of course, there's where the ache comes in. In a case like that, it isn't so much that one dies as that the other lives. It's none of my business; but she seemed rather lonely. They have no acquaintance among the other cottagers, and—did you think of taking your wife over? Excuse me!"

"Why, of course! I'm so glad you suggested it. Mrs. March will be most happy to go with me."

III.

Mrs. March dissembled her joy at the prospect when I opened it to her. She said she did not see how she entered into the affair. Faulkner was an old friend of mine; but she had nothing to do with him, and certainly nothing to do with his wife. They would not like each other; it would look patronising; it would complicate matters; she did not see what good it would do for her to go. I constantly fell back upon the doctor's suggestion. In the end, she went. She professed to be governed entirely by Dr. Wingate's opinion of our duty in the case; I acknowledged a good deal of curiosity as well as some humanity, and I boldly proposed to gratify both. But in fact I felt rather ashamed of my motives when I met Faulkner, and I righted myself in my own regard by instantly shifting my visit to the ground of friendly civility. He seemed surprised and touched to see me, and he welcomed

my wife with that rather decorative politeness which men of Southern extraction use toward women. He was not going to have any of my compassion as an invalid, that was clear; and he put himself on a level with me in the matter of health at once. He said it was very good of Dr. Wingate to send me so soon, and I was very good to come; he was rather expecting the doctor himself in the afternoon; he had been out of kilter for two or three years; but he was getting all right now. I knew he did not believe this, but I made believe not to know it, and I even said, when he asked me how I was, that I was so-so; and I left him to infer that everybody was out of kilter, and perhaps just in his own way.

"Well, let us go up to the house," he said, as if this gave him a pleasure, "and find Mrs. Faulkner. You never met my wife, March? Her people used to live just outside the city line, on Pawpaw Creek. They were of New England origin," he added to my wife; "but I don't know whether you'll find her very much of a Yankee. She has passed most of her life in the West. She will be very glad to see you; we have no acquaintances about here. Your Eastern people don't catch on to the homeless

stranger quite so quickly as we do in the West. I dare say they don't let go so easily, either."

We had found Faulkner at the gate of his avenue, and we began to walk with him at once toward his cottage, under the arches of the sea-beaten, somewhat wizened elms, which all slanted landward, with a writhing fling of their grey and yellow lichened boughs. It was a delicious morning, and the cool sunshine dripped in through the thin leaves, here and there blighted at the edge and faded, and seemed to lie in pools in the road. The fine air was fresh, and brought from a distance apparently greater than it really came the plunge of the surf against the rocks, and the crash of the rollers along the beach. The ground fell away in a wide stretch of neglected lawn toward the water; and the autumnal dandelions lifted their stars on their tall slender stems from the long grass, which was full of late summer glint and sheen, and blowing with a delicate sway and tilt of its blades in the breeze that tossed the elms.

"What a lovely place!" sighed my wife.

"You haven't begun to see it," said Faulkner. "We've got twenty acres of land here, and all the sea and sky there are. Mrs. Faulkner will want to

show you the whole affair. Did you walk up from the station? I'll send for your baggage from the house."

"That won't be necessary; I have it on my arm," said my wife, and she put her little shopping bag in evidence with a gay twirl.

"Why, but you're going to stay all night?"

"Oh no, indeed! What would become of our children?"

"We'll send to Lynn for them."

"Thank you; it couldn't be managed. I won't try to convince you, Mr. Faulkner, but I'm sure your wife will be reasonable," she said, to forestall the protests which she saw hovering in his eyes.

I noticed that his eyes, once so beautiful, had a dull and suffering look, and the smokiness of his complexion had a kind of livid stain in it. His hair straggled from under his soft felt hat with the unkempt effect I remembered, and his dress had a sort of characteristic slovenliness. He carried a stick, and his expressive hands seemed longer and languider, as if relaxed from a nervous tension borne beyond the strength.

"Well, I'm sorry," said Faulkner. "But you're booked for the day, anyway."

My wife apparently did not think it worth while to dispute this; or perhaps she was waiting to have it out with Mrs. Faulkner. He put up his arm across my shoulders, and gave me a little pull toward him. "It 's mighty pleasant to see you again, old fellow! I can't tell you *how* pleasant."

I was not to be outdone in civilities, and my cordiality in reply retrospectively established our former acquaintance on a ground of intimacy which it had never really occupied. My wife knew this and gave me a look of surprise, which I could see hardening into the resolution not to betray herself, at least, into insincerities.

"You 'll find another old acquaintance of yours here," Faulkner went on. "You remember Nevil?"

"Your clerical friend? Yes, indeed! Is he here?" I put as much factitious rapture into my tone as it would hold.

"Yes; we were in Europe together, and he 's spending a month with us here." Faulkner spoke gloomily, almost sullenly; he added brightly, "You know I can't get along without Jim. He was in Europe with us, too, a good deal of the time. Yes, we 've always been great friends."

"You remember I told you about Mr. Nevil, my dear," I explained to my wife.

"Oh, yes," she said non-committally.

Faulkner slipped his hand from my shoulder into my arm, and gently stayed my pace a little. I perceived that he was leaning on me; but I made a feint of our being merely affectionate, and slowed my step as unconsciously as I could. He looked up under the downward slanted brim of his hat. "I expected them before this. Nevil went up to the house for my wife, and then we were going down on the rocks."

He stopped short, and rested heavily against me. I glanced round at his face: it was a lurid red, and, as it were, suffused with pain: his eyes seemed to stand full of tears; his lips were purple, and they quivered.

It was an odious moment: we could not speak or stir; we suffered too, and were cruelly embarrassed, for we felt that we must not explicitly recognise his seizure. In front of us I saw a gentleman and lady who seemed to be under something of our constraint. They were coming as swiftly as possible, without seeming to hurry, and they must have understood

the situation, though they could not see his features. Before they reached us, Faulkner's face relaxed, and began to recover its natural colour. He stirred, and I felt him urging me softly forward. By the time we encountered the others, he was able to say, in very much his usual tone, "My dear, this is Mrs. March, and my old friend March, that I 've told you about. Nevil, you remember March? Let me present you to Mrs. March."

My astonishment that he could accomplish these introductions was lost in the interest that Mrs. Faulkner at once inspired in my wife, as I could see, equally with myself. She must then have been about thirty, and she had lost her girlish slenderness without having lost her girlish grace. Her figure, tall much above the wont of women, had a mature stateliness, while fitful gleams of her first youth brightened her face, her voice, her manner. There could be no doubt about her refinement, and none about her beauty; the one was as evident as the other. The beauty was of a usual American type; the refinement was from her eyes, which were angelic; deep and faithful and touching. I am sure this was the first impression of my wife as well as myself.

I shook hands with Nevil, whom I found looking not so much older as the past ten years should have made him. His dark golden hair had retreated a little on his forehead, and there were some faint, faint lines down his cheeks and his shaven lips. I saw the look of anxiety he cast furtively at Faulkner; but for that he seemed as young and high-hearted as when we first met. I searched his eyes for the clear goodness which once dwelt in them, and found it, a little saddened, a little sobered, a little more saintly, but all there, still. I cannot tell how my heart went out to him with a tenderness which nothing in his behaviour toward me had ever invited. On the few occasions when we met, he had always loyally left me to Faulkner, who made all the advances and offered all the caresses, without winning any such return of affection from me as I now involuntarily felt for Nevil. Of course I looked at my wife to see what she thought of him. I saw that something in her being a woman, which drew her to Mrs. Faulkner, left her indifferent to Nevil.

IV.

"HERMIA," said Faulkner, sounding the canine letter in her name with a Western strength that was full of the charm of old associations for me, "these people have got some children at Lynn, and they can't stay here overnight because they didn't bring them. I'm going to send over for them."

"Oh, I should like to see your children," she answered to my wife cordially, yet submissively, as the way of one wise woman is with another concerning her children.

Mrs. March explained how it was in no wise possible to have the children sent for; and how we had only come for a short call. I perceived that all Mrs. Faulkner's politeness could not keep her mind on what my wife was saying: that she was scanning her husband's face with devoted intensity. The same absence showed itself in Nevil's manner. Of course they were both terribly anxious; I could

understand that from what I had already seen of Faulkner's case; and in his interest they were both trying to hide their anxiety. Of course, too, he knew it on his part, and he tried to ignore their efforts at concealment. We were all playing at the futile and heart-breaking comedy which humanity obliges us to keep up with a dying man, and in which he must bear his part with the rest. We began to be even gay. Faulkner insisted again that we were good for the whole day; his wife joined him; he appealed to Nevil to put it to Mrs. March as a duty (that would fetch any New England woman, he said), and we consented to stay over lunch, in a burlesque of being kept prisoners. While this went on, I could not help noticing the quality of the look which Faulkner turned upon his wife and Nevil when he spoke to either: a sort of deadliness passing into a piteous appeal. It was very curious.

He asked if we should go down on the rocks, or up to the house, and we decided that we had better go to the house, and do the rocks after lunch: the tide was coming in, and the surf would be better and better.

"All right," he said, and we let Mr. Nevil lead the

way with the ladies, while we came at a little distance behind. Faulkner began at once to praise Nevil, for his goodness in staying on with him so long after he had given up to him the whole past year in Europe. I said the proper things in appreciation, and Faulkner went on to say that Nevil had the richest and the poorest parish in our old home now, the most millionaires and the most paupers; and he had made St. Luke's a refuge and a sanctuary for them all. He said he did not suppose a man had ever been so fortunate as he was in his friendship with Nevil. At first his wife had been jealous of it, but now she had got used to it; and though he did not suppose she would ever quite forgive Nevil for having been his friend before her time, she tolerated him. I said I understood how that sort of thing was; and he added that there was also the religious difference: Mrs. Faulkner's people were Unitarians, and she was strenuous in their faith, where he never allowed her to be molested. We got to talking about the old times in the West, and the people whom we had known in common, and how the city had grown, and how I would hardly know where I was if I were dropped down in it. But he

kept returning to Nevil and to his wife, and I became rather tired of them.

The cottage, when we reached it, afforded a relief by its extremely remarkable prettiness. Though it was so near the sea, it was almost hidden in trees, and as Faulkner said, if you did not purposely look out to the water, you could easily imagine yourself in the depths of the country. As we sat on the veranda that shaded three sides of the house, he named the different points on the coast, with the curious accuracy which some people like to achieve in particulars wholly unimportant to other people. I suppose he had amused the sad leisure of his sickness in verifying the geography, and I tried to be interested in it, though I was so much more interested in him. He sat deeply sunken in a low Japanese arm-chair of rushes, with his long lean legs one crossed on the other, and fondling the crook of his stick with his thin right hand, while he looked out to seaward under the brim of his hat pulled down to his eyes. Nevil went directly to his room when we reached the cottage, and after a little while Mrs. Faulkner took my wife away to show her the house, which was vast and extravagantly furnished for a

summer cottage. "It had gone unlet until very late in the season," Faulkner said, "and you've no idea how cheap we got it. I suppose it's a little out of society, off here on this point; you see it's quite alone; but as we're out of society, too, it just suits us."

He looked after his wife as she left the veranda with Mrs. March, and I fancied in his glance at her buoyant, strenuous grace and her beauty of perfect health, something of the despair with which a sick man must feel the whole world slipping from his hold, too weak to close upon the most precious possession, and keep it for his helplessness even while he stays.

The ladies were gone a good while, and he rambled on incessantly as if to keep me from thinking about his condition; or at least I fancied this because I could not help thinking of it. Just as they returned, he was asking me, "Do you remember our talking that night about Kant's dreams, and——" He stopped, and called out to my wife, "Well, don't you think we are in luck?"

"Luck doesn't express it, Mr. Faulkner. You're in clover, knee-deep. I didn't imagine there was such a place, anywhere."

"After lunch we must show you our old garden, as well as the rocks," said Faulkner. "At present I don't see how we could do better than stay where we are."

I thought he was going to recur to the subject he had dropped at sight of the returning ladies, but he did not. He asked my wife if Mrs. Faulkner had shown her the copy they had made of Murillo's Madonna, and he talked about its qualities with an authoritative ignorance of art which I should have found amusing in different circumstances. He had made a complete collection of all the engravings of this Madonna, and of all the sentimental Madonnas of the Parmesan school. He considered them very spiritual, and said he would show them to us, sometime; he always carried them about with him; but he wanted to keep something to tempt us back another day. He asked her if she cared for rare editions, and said he wished he had his large paper copies with him. He told her I would remember them, and I pretended that I did. I do not think Faulkner had read much since I saw him. He talked about Bulwer and Dickens, and Cherbuliez and Octave Feuillet as if they were modern. But

nobody came up to Victor Hugo. Of course we had both read *Les Miserables*? Mrs. Faulkner, he said, was crazy about a Russian fellow: Tourguénief. Had we read him, and could we make anything out of him? Faulkner could not, for his part. Were we ever going to have any great poets again? Byron was the last that you could really call great.

His wife listened in a watchful abeyance to see if he needed anything, or felt worse, or was getting tired. From time to time he sent her for some book, or print, or curio that he mentioned, and whenever she came back, he gave her first that deadly look. Afterward, I fancied that he despatched her on these errands to make experiment of how the sight of her would affect him at each return.

The sea stretched a vast shimmer of thin greyish blue under the perfect sky; and the ships moved half sunk on its rim, or seemed buoyantly lifting from it for flight in the nearer distance. The colours were those of an aquarelle, washes of this tint and that, bodyless and impalpable, and they were attenuated to the last thinness in the long yellow curve of beach, and the break of the shallow rollers upon it. Faulkner said they never

got tired of looking; there was one effect on the wide wet beach, which he wished we could see, when people were riding toward you, and seemed to be walking on some kind of extraordinary stilts.

Mr. Nevil came down, and then Mrs. Faulkner said it must be near lunch-time, and asked my wife and me if we would not like to go to our room first.

V.

As soon as the door closed upon us, my wife broke out: "*Well*, my dear! it 's just as I imagined. What a tiresome creature! And how ignorant and arrogant! Is *that* what you call a cultivated person in the West?"

"Well, I don't think I shall quite hold myself responsible for Faulkner; I 'll own he hasn't improved since I saw him last. But I always told you he was a sentimentalist."

"Sentimentalist! He 's one *sop* of sentiment; and as conventional! Second-rate and second-hand! Why, my *dear*! Could you ever have thought there was anything to that man?"

"Well, certainly more than I do at present. But I don't recollect that I ever boasted him Apollo and the nine Muses all boiled down into one."

She did not relent. "Why, compared with him, that Mr. Nevil is a burning and a shining light."

"Nevil has certainly gathered brilliancy somehow," I admitted.

"It 's quite like such a man as Faulkner to want a three-cornered household. I think the man who can't give up his intimate friends after he 's married, is always a kind of weakling. He has no right to them; it 's a tacit reflection on his wife's heart and mind."

"Yes, I think you 're quite right there," I said, waiting for her to put the restorative touches to the bang which the sea-breeze had made a little too limp for social purposes; and we went over together the list of households we knew in which the husband supplemented himself with a familiar friend. We agreed that it was the innocence of our life that made it so common, but we said all the same that it was undignified and silly and mischievous. It kept the husband and wife apart, and kept them from the absolutely free exchange of tendernesses at any and every moment, and forbade them the equally wholesome immediate expression of resentments, or else gave their quarrels a witness whom they could not look at without remembering that they had quarrelled in his presence. We made allowance for the differ-

ence in the case of Nevil and the Faulkners; there was now at least a real reason for his being with them; they would have been singularly lonely and helpless without him.

"They have no children!" said my wife. "That says it all. They are really not a family. Oh, dear! I hope it isn't wicked for us to be so happy in our children, Basil."

"It's a sin that I think I can brazen out at the Day of Judgment," I answered. "What does she say when you have her alone with another woman?"

"Well, there you've hit upon the true test, my dear. If a person's genuine, and not a *poseuse*, she's more interesting when you have her alone with another woman, than when you have her with a lot of men. And Mrs. Faulkner stands the test. Yes, she's a great creature."

"Why, what did she say?"

"Say? Nothing! You don't have to *say* anything. You merely have to *be*."

"Oh! That seems rather simple."

"Stuff! You know what I mean. You're the true blue, if you don't begin to fade or change your tone, in the least. If you remain just what you

were, and are not anxious to get away. If you have repose, and are unselfish enough to be truly polite. If you make the other woman that you're alone with feel that she's just as well worth while as a man. And that can't be done by *saying*. Now do you understand?"

"Yes; and it appears difficult."

"Difficult? It's next to impossible!"

"And it can all be conveyed by manner?"

"Of course we talked——"

"She must have flattered you enormously."

"She praised *you*!"

"Oh!" I said in admiration of the way my point was turned against me. But I was not satisfied with my wife's judgment of Faulkner. I could not say it was unjust to the facts before her, but I felt that something was left out of the account: something that she as a woman and an Easterner could not take into the account. We men and we Westerners have a civilisation of our own.

She went on to say, "Of course I couldn't be with her for quarter of an hour, and especially after I had seen what *he* was, without understanding her marriage. She's a great deal younger than he is; and

she was earning her own living, poor thing, and perhaps supporting her family——"

"Oh, oh! What jumps!"

"At any rate, she was poor, and they were poor; and she was dazzled by his offer, and might easily have supposed herself in love with him. Her people would be flattered too, if they were not quite up to her, and he was a great swell among you, out there, and rich, and all that. Of course she simply *had* to marry him. And then—she outgrew him. With her taste and her sense, it could only be a question of time. I know she was writhing inwardly through all his pretentious, ignorant talk about art and literature; but with her ideal of duty, she would rather *die* than let anybody see that she *didn't* think him the greatest and wisest of human creatures. They have no children; and that might be fatal to any woman that was less noble and heroic than she is. But she's simply made *him* her child since his sickness, and devoted herself to him, and that's been their salvation. She won't let herself see any fault in him, or anything offensive or conceited or petty."

"Did she tell you all this?"

"What an idea! I *knew* it from the way she

kept lugging him in, and relating everything to him. You could see she was simply determined to do it."

"Oh then you 've romanced all this about her! Suppose I begin, now, and romance poor old Faulkner?"

"You 're welcome; if you can make anything out of him."

"Well, of course, I 'm at a disadvantage. In the first place, he isn't quite so pretty as his wife——"

"No, he *isn't*!"

"And his name isn't Hermia, or Hannah."

"Oh, it *is* Hermia!" my wife interrupted. "I 'm satisfied of that. But what geese her parents must have been to call her so!"

I ignored the interpolation. "And he hasn't got a regular two-horse carriage of a walk, nor immortal eyes with starlike sorrows in them; he seems plainer and limper than ever, poor old fellow. Ah, my dear, our miseries don't embellish our persons very much, whatever they do for our souls; and Faulkner's good looks—"

My wife had quite finished repairing her disordered bang, and we had abandoned ourselves entirely to controversy. A knock at the door

startled us, and it was Mrs. Faulkner's voice which said outside, "Lunch is ready."

My wife seized my wrist melodramatically, and almost at the moment of answering, in a sweet, high society tone, "Yes, yes, thank you! We're *quite* ready too!" she hissed in my ear, "Basil! Do you suppose she *heard* you?"

"If she did," I said, "she must have thought I was praising Faulkner's beauty."

VI.

The lunch was a proof of Mrs. Faulkner's native skill as a housekeeper, in all its appointments, and of her experience and observation of certain details of touch and flavour, acclimated and naturalised to the American kitchen from the cuisines of Southern Europe. It meant money, but not money alone; it meant sympathy and appreciation and the artistic sense. I could see that my wife ate every morsel with triumph over me; I could feel that without looking at her; and she rendered merit to Mrs. Faulkner for it all, as much as if she had cooked it, created it. In fact I knew that my wife had fallen in love with her; and when you have fallen in love with a married woman you must of course hate her husband, especially if you are another woman.

I thought this reflection rather neat, and I wished that I could have a chance to put it to my wife; but none offered till it was for ever too late; none offered

at all, in effect. After lunch we went that walk they had planned, and this time Faulkner took the two ladies in charge, or rather he fell to them, that he might tacitly be under his wife's care. I heard him, as I lagged behind with Nevil, devoting himself to Mrs. March with his decorative politeness, and I longed in vain to beg the poor man to spare himself.

Nevil and I spoke irrelevancies till we had dropped back out of ear-shot. Then he asked, "How do you find Faulkner?" and looked at me.

There was no reason why I should not be honest. "Well, I confess he gave me a great shock."

"When he had that seizure?"

"Yes."

"But generally speaking?"

"Generally speaking he seems to me a very sick man."

"You see him at his best," said Nevil; and he fetched a deep sigh. "This is an exceptionally good day with him."

"Does he suffer often in that way?"

"Yes; rather often."

"And is he in danger at such times?"

"The greatest. The chance is that he will not

live through such a seizure; he may die at any moment without the seizure. Any little excitement may bring on the paroxysm. I suppose it was seeing you unexpectedly."

"Of course, I didn't know we should meet him."

"Oh, no one was to blame," said Nevil. "The inevitable can't be avoided. Somehow it must come."

We were silent. Then I said, "He seemed to be in great agony."

"I suppose we can't imagine such agony."

"And is there no hope for him?"

"I understand, none at all."

"And he must go on suffering that way till—— It's horrible! He'd better be dead!" I said, remembering the atrocity of the anguish which Faulkner's face had betrayed: the livid lips, the suffused eyes, the dumb ache visible in every fibre of his dull, copper-tinted visage.

"Ah!" said Nevil, with another long, quivering sigh. "We mustn't allow ourselves to say such things, or even to think them. The appeal to death from the most intolerable pain, it's going from the known to the unknown. Death is in the hands of

God, as life is; he giveth and he taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord! Blessed, blessed!" He dropped his head, and lifted it suddenly. "We must say that all the more when we see such hopeless, senseless torment as Faulkner's. I've often tried to think what Christ meant by that cry of his on the cross, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' It couldn't have been that he doubted his Father; that's monstrous. But perhaps in the exquisite torture that he suffered, his weak, bewildered human nature forgot, lost for the dire moment, the reason of pain."

"And is there any reason for pain?" I asked sceptically. "Or any except that it frays away the tissues whose tatters are to let the spirit through?"

"I used not to think so, and I used to groan in despair when I could see no other reason for it. What can we say about the pain that does not end in death? Is it wasted, suffered to no end? Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall man work wisely, usefully, definitely, and God work stupidly, idly, purposelessly? It's impossible! Our whole being denies it; whatever we see or hear, of waste or aimlessness in the universe, which seems to

affirm it, we know to be an illusion: our very nature protests it so. But I could not reason to the reason, and I owe my release to the suggestion of a friend whose experience of suffering had schooled him to clearer and deeper insight than mine. He had perceived, or it had been given him to feel, that no pang we suffer in soul or sense, is lost or wasted, but is suffered to the good of some one, or of all. How, we shall some time know; and why. For the present the assurance that it is so, is enough for me, and it enables me to be patient with the suffering of a man who is more to me than any brother could be. Sometimes it seems to me the clew to the whole labyrinthine mystery of life and death, of Being and Not-being."

"It's a great thought," I said. "It's immensely comforting. What does Faulkner think of it? Have you ever suggested it to him?"

I could not tell whether he fancied an edge of irony in my question; but it seemed as if he spiritually withdrew from me a little way, and then disciplined himself and returned. "No," he said gently. "Faulkner rejects everything. As he says, he is going it blind. He says it will soon be over

with him, and then if he sleeps, it will be well with him, and if he wakes it can't be worse with him than it is now; and so he won't worry about the why or wherefore of anything since he can't help it."

"That doesn't seem a bad kind of philosophy," I mused aloud.

"No. Whatever we call such a frame of mind, it's practically trust in God. And I don't judge Faulkner, if his resignation is sometimes rather contemptuous in its expression. I wish it were otherwise; but I doubt if he's always quite master of himself."

We walked slowly on. Faulkner, I knew, was aware of his condition, and I thought his courage splendid, in view of it. I wondered if his wife knew it as fully as he; probably she did; and when I considered this, I appeared to myself the most trivial of human beings, though I am not so sure now that I was. We are all what the absence, not the presence, of death has made us.

I found myself at a standstill, and I perceived that Nevil had halted me. "Did it strike you—have you seen anything strange—peculiar—in Faulkner's manner?"

"No," I returned. "That is, how do you mean?"

"I've sometimes fancied lately—I've been afraid—that his mind was giving way under the stress of his suffering. It's something that often happens—it's something that Dr. Wingate has apprehended."

"Good heavens! That would be too much. I saw no sign of it. He recurred once, just before lunch, to that night when we first met at his house, and had that talk about Kant's dreams, and De Quincey. I thought he was going to say something; but just then the ladies came back to us and he began to talk to them."

Nevil looked at me fixedly. "Very likely I'm mistaken. Perhaps my own mind isn't standing it very well! But the fear of that additional horror, I assure you that it makes my heart stop when I think of it. I ought to go away. I ought to be at home; I've spent the past year in Europe with the Faulkners, as—as their guest—and I have no right to a vacation this summer. There are duties, interests, claims upon me, that I'm neglecting in my proper work; and yet I can't tear myself away from him—from them."

We stood facing each other, and Nevil was speak-

ing with the perturbation of an anxiety still suppressed, but now finding vent for the first time, and carrying us deep into an intimacy unwarranted by the casual character of our acquaintance.

I heard my wife's voice calling, "Come, come!" and I looked up to see both of the ladies waving their handkerchiefs from an open gate where they stood, and beckoning us on.

"Oh yes," said Nevil. "That 's the old garden."

VII.

Some former proprietor had built a paling of slender strips of wood ten or twelve feet high, and set so close together as almost to touch one another; and in this shelter from the salt gales had planted a garden on the southward, seaward slope, which must once have flourished in delicious luxuriance. The paling, weather-beaten a silvery grey, and blotched with lichens, sagged and swayed all out of plumb, with here and there a belvedere trembling upon rotting posts, and reached by broken steps, for the outlook over a tumult of vast rocks to the illimitable welter of the sea. Within the garden close there were old greenhouses and graperies, their roofs sunken in and their glass shattered, where every spring the tall weeds sprang up to the light, and withered in midsummer for want of moisture, and the Black Hamburgs and Sweetwaters set in large clusters whose berries mildewed and burst, and

mouldered away in never-riping decay. Broken flower-pots strewed the ground about them, and filled the tangles of the grass; but nature took up the word from art, and continued the old garden in her wilding fashion to an effect of disordered loveliness that was full of poetry sad to heart-break. Neglected rose-bushes straggled and fell in the high grass, their leaves tattered and skeletoned by slugs and blight; but here and there they still lifted a belated flower. The terraced garden beds were dense with witch-grass, through which the blackberry vines trailed their leaves, already on fire with autumn; young sumach-trees and Balm of Gilead scrub had sprung up in the paths, and about among the abandon and oblivion of former symmetry, stiff borders of box gave out their pungent odour in the sun that shone through clumps of tiger-lilies. The pear-trees in their places had been untouched by the pruning-knife for many a year, but they bore on their knotty and distorted scions, swollen to black lumps, crops of gnarled and misshapen fruit that bowed their branches to the ground; some peach-trees held a few leprous peaches, pale, and spotted with the gum that exuded from their limbs and

trunks; over staggering trellises the grape-vines clung, and dangled imperfect bunches of Isabellas and Concords.

"Well, how do you like it?" asked Faulkner, with a sort of pride in our sensation, as if he had invented the place.

"Perfect! Perfect!" cried my wife absorbing all its sentiment in a long, in-drawn sigh. "Nothing could possibly be better. You can't believe you're in America here!"

He smiled in sympathy, and said, "No, for all practical purposes this is as old as Cæsar. That's what I used to feel over there. You can hold only just so much antiquity. The ruin of twenty years, if it's complete in its way, can fill you as full as the ruin of a thousand."

"Yes, that's true," my wife answered, and I saw her eyes begin to light up with liking for a man who could express her feeling so well.

"But to enjoy perfectly a melancholy, a desolation, a crazy charm, a dead and dying beauty like this," he went on, "one ought to be very young and prosperous and happy. Then it would exhale all the sweetness of its melancholy, and distil into one's cup

the drop of pathos that gives pleasure its keenest thrill." His voice broke with a feeling that forbade me to censure his words for magniloquence.

It seemed to make his wife uneasy; perhaps from long, close observation of him she knew how often the spiritual throe runs into the physical pang, and feared for the effect of his mood upon him.

"Shall we go on and show them the rocks from the Point, or from one of the belvederes here?" she asked.

"I don't care," he said wearily; and again I saw that deadliness in the look he gave her. Then he seemed to recollect himself, and added politely, "I 'm afraid of those belvederes; you can't tell what moment they 're going to give way. Better go out to the Point."

"Do you think," she entreated, "you had better walk so far?"

"Well, perhaps March will stay here with me a while, and we can follow you later. I 'm all right; only a little tired."

I acquiesced, of course, and the ladies, after the usual flutter of civilities, started on. Nevil lingered to ask, "Doug, don't you think I'd better go back

and leave word for the doctor where he 'll find you, if he happens to come before we return to the house?"

"Oh, I 've arranged all that," said Faulkner, with a kind of dryness, as it seemed, though it might have been merely a sick man's impatience; and he did not look up after Nevil as he turned away.

We stood silent a moment, after he left us, and I said, to break the constraint, "How much all this seems like those been-there-before seizures which we used to make so much of when we were young. This garden, this sky, the sea out there, the very *feel* of the air, are as familiar to me as any most intimate experience of my life, and yet I know it 's all as unreal, as unsubstantial historically, as the shadow of a dream."

"How horribly," said Faulkner, as if he had not heard me, "those old flower-beds look like graves. I was going to sit down on one of them, but I can't do it."

"It would have been pretty damp, anyway; wouldn't it?" I suggested.

"Perhaps. We can sit in that idiotic arbour, I suppose."

He nodded at the frail structure on the terrace

below where we stood: two sides of trellis meeting in an arch, and canted over like the belvederes; a dead grape-vine hung upon it. I stepped down, and made sure of the benches which faced each other under the arch. "Yes; they 're all right. Nothing could be better," and Faulkner followed me, and took one of them. After some experiment of its strength, he leaned back in the corner of the arbour, and put his legs up along the seat.

The hoarse plunge and wash of the surf on the rocks below the garden filled the air like the texture of a denser silence; around us the crickets and grasshoppers blent their monotonies with it.

"Why do you call the shadow of a dream unsubstantial?" he demanded.

"Well, I don't know," I said. "I don't suppose I meant to say that it was more unsubstantial than other shadows."

"No. Of course." He dropped his eyelids, and went on talking with them closed; the effect was curious; perhaps he found he could keep himself calmer in that way. "I began to speak to you a little while ago of the talk we had that night at my house about old Kant's nightmares."

"Oh yes; poor old fellow! It was awful, his being afraid to go to sleep because he was sure to have them. I don't know but that's a touch worse than not being able to go to sleep at all. Just imagine: as soon as you drop off to refreshing slumber, as you would otherwise expect, you find you've dropped as it were into hell."

"Yes; that's it," said Faulkner. "I wonder if it was the same thing over and over."

"I don't remember what De Quincey says about that; and I don't know whether that would be worse or not. Perhaps, torment for torment, infernal monotony would be more infernal than infernal variety. But there couldn't be much choice."

Faulkner did not speak at once. Then he asked, "Did you ever have a recurrent dream?"

"A dream that repeated itself several times the same night? Yes, I've waked from a dream—or seemed to wake—and then fallen asleep and dreamed it again; and then waked and slept and dreamed it a third time. I suppose nearly every one has had that experience."

"I don't mean that kind of dream," said Faulkner. "I mean a dream that recurs regularly,

once a week or so, with little or no change in its incidents."

"No; I never had that kind of dream; I don't know that I ever heard of such a dream. I remember your speaking that night about shameful dreams, that projected a sense of dishonour over half the next day. I've had that kind. They're a great nuisance. And then, if I've made free, as one's appallingly apt to do in such dreams, with persons of my acquaintance, it's extremely embarrassing to meet them." Faulkner smiled, and I asked, "Do you find that your dream habit has changed since you were younger?"

"Yes; the dreams are more vivid; but usually I don't remember them so distinctly. I suppose it's like life: we experience things with a sharper and fuller consciousness than we once did, but they leave less impression."

"Yes, yes!" I assented. "I wonder why."

"Oh, I suppose because the fact is inscribed upon a surface that's already occupied. We're all old palimpsests by the time we reach forty. In youth we present a *tabula rasa* to experience."

"Then I should think we wouldn't receive im-

pressions with that sharper and fuller consciousness," I suggested. "And yet I know we do."

"I don't understand it either," said Faulkner.

"There's one thing I've noticed of late years in my own dream habit, which I don't remember in the past. I go to sleep sometimes—almost always in my afternoon naps—with a perfectly wide-awake knowledge that I'm doing so; and I'm able to pass the bounds with my eyes open, as it were. I can say to myself as I drowse off, 'This is a dream thought, if I find something grotesque floating through my mind, and then, 'This is a waking thought,' when there is something logical and matter-of-fact. I come and go, that way, half a dozen times before I lose myself."

"That is very curious, very interesting," said Faulkner; and he raised his heavy eyelids for a smiling glance at me, and then let them drop. His face sobered almost to frowning sternness as he went on. "There's a whole region of experience—half the map of our life—that they tell us must always remain a wilderness, with all its extraordinary phenomena irredeemably savage and senseless. For my part, I don't believe it. I will put the wisdom

of the ancients before the science of the moderns, and I will say with Elihu, 'In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed ; then He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.'"

"It's noble poetry," I said.

"It's more than that," said Faulkner. "It's truth."

"Perhaps it was in the beginning, when men lived nearer to the origin of life, but I doubt if it's more than noble poetry now ; though that of course is truth in its way."

Faulkner opened his eyes and let his legs drop to the ground. I saw that my dissent had excited him, and I was sorry ; I resolved to agree with him at the first possible moment.

"Why should God be farther from men in our days than he was in Job's ?" he demanded.

"It isn't that," I said. "It's men who are farther from God."

"Oh ! *That's* a pretty quibble. But it gives you away, all the same. Do you mean to say that if you had a graphic and circumstantial dream, about something of importance to you ; something you intended to do, a journey you intended to take, or an

enterprise you were thinking of, and your dream contained a forecast or warning, do you mean to say you wouldn't be influenced by it?"

"Certainly, I should," I answered; and I couldn't help adding, "or rather the ancestral tent-dweller within me would be influenced."

"Oh!" Faulkner sneered. "God's neighbour, or the neighbour of God?"

I had made a bad business of trying to agree with him. I braced myself for another effort. "Why, Faulkner, *I* don't deny anything. All that I contend for is that we should not throw away 'the long result of time,' and return to the bondage of the superstitions that cursed the childhood of the race, that blackened every joy of its youth and spread a veil of innocent blood between it and the skies. There may be something in dreams; if there is, our thoughts, not our fears, will find it out. I am a coward, like everybody else; perhaps rather more of a coward; but if I had a dream that contained a forecast or a warning of evil, I should feel it my duty in the interest of civilisation to defy it; though I don't say I should be able to do it. On the contrary, I think very likely I should lie down under it, and shudder

out some propitiatory aspiration to the offended fetish that was threatening me."

Faulkner seemed a little placated. "I understand what you mean; and I know the danger of giving way to the nervous tremors that vibrate in us from the horrible old times when, on this very coast, a wretched woman would have been caught up and flung in jail, and hung on the gallows because some distempered child had dreamed that it saw her with the Black Man in the forest. But I'm not ready to say that a dream, recurring and recurring with the clearest circumstance, and without variation in its details, is idle and meaningless. Who is that Frenchman who wrote about the diseases of personality? Ribot! Well, he tells how people about to be attacked by disease are 'warned in a dream' of what is to happen. A man dreams of a mad dog, and wakes up with a malignant ulcer in the spot where he was bitten; dreams of an epileptic, and wakes to have his first fit; dreams of a deaf-mute, and wakes with a palsied tongue. He says that these are intimations of calamity from the recesses of the organism to the nerve centres, which we don't notice in the hurly-burly of conscious life."

"Yes, I remember that passage. And I have had one such experience myself," I said.

"Very well, then," said Faulkner. "If in the physical, why not in the moral world? If you dream persistently of evil, of perfidy, of treachery, so distinctly and perfectly bodied forth that when you wake the dream seems the reality, and your consciousness the delusion, why should you treat your vision with contempt? Why should not the psychologist respect it as something quite as gravely significant in its way as those dream hints of impending malady which no pathologist would ignore?"

I now perceived that I was in the presence of what was on Faulkner's mind. I did not know what it was, and I did not expect that he would tell me. I did not wish him to tell me; I fancied that I might help him better if I did not know just the make and manner of his trouble; and I longed to help him, for I saw that he longed for help. I felt that his logic was false, and I believed that he had entangled himself in it only after many attempts to escape it; but I did not know just which point of it to touch first. I felt him looking at me with im-

ploring challenge, but I did not lift my head till I heard a step in the long, tangled grass, and heard the voice of Dr. Wingate in a cheerful, "Hello! hello! You here, March? Well, that's good!"

Another step, another voice would have been startling; but these were with us, in a manner, before we heard them, and they brought support and repose with them.

"I'm glad to see you, doctor," I said, without making ceremony of the greetings which I saw he was disposed to ignore.

He shook hands impartially with Faulkner and with me as if he were no more interested in one than the other; his large, honest, friendly stomach bowed out as he stood a moment wiping the sweat from his forehead, and looking round him. "*Isn't* this a nice old place? I never see this garden without a kind of satisfaction in it as one of the things that money can't buy. There are mighty few of them. But here's one that only the loss of money can buy. Heigh?"

Wingate sat down, tentatively at first, on the other end of my seat, and faced Faulkner, still without seeming to take any special interest in him.

I repeated, "I'm glad to see you, doctor; and I'm

particularly glad to see you in a metaphysical mood, for Faulkner, here, has got me in a corner, and I want you to get me out."

"Ah? Am I in a metaphysical mood? What's your corner?" The doctor worked his elbow into the trellis behind him, and then swayed back on it.

"We were talking about dreams," I said, "and we had got as far as Ribot, and his instances of dreams that prophesy maladies. You know them."

"Oh yes. Well?"

"Well, Faulkner says if a man dreams of physical evil, and the dream is prophetic, or worthy of scientific regard, why shouldn't the dream that forebodes moral evil be considered seriously too; why shouldn't it be held to be truly prophetic?"

The doctor smiled. "It seems to me you're pretty easily cornered. I should say that the dream of moral evil should certainly be seriously considered: not as prophetic in the least of what it foreboded, but as prophetic of very grave mental disturbance,—if it persisted. I should be afraid that it was the rehearsal of a mania that was soon to burst out in waking madness. If it persisted," said the doctor,

looking still at me, "and he yielded to it, I should feel anxious for the dreamer's sanity."

Faulkner sat with his face twisted away from us, as if the doctor had been looking at him, and he wished to avoid his eye. "I don't see," I said, "but what that settles it, Faulkner?"

"Oh, it's a very good answer in its way," said Faulkner, still without looking at us. "But it takes no account of the spiritual element in such experiences."

"No," said the doctor, "and I should be ashamed of it if it did. As long as we have on this muddy vesture of decay, the less medicine meddles and makes with our immortal part, the better. Of course, I'm not speaking for the Christian Scientists."

"Then you don't consider the mind immortal?" demanded Faulkner.

"I don't consider the brain immortal. And I think I've seen the mind in decay."

We were all silent. I found a comfort in this robust and clear refusal of Wingate's to dally with any sort of ifs and ans, and to deal only with the facts of experience, which I felt must impart itself in

some measure to Faulkner, even through his refusal. At the same time I was a little ashamed of not having myself been able to come to his rescue. The silence prolonged itself, and I began to see that the doctor wished to be alone with his patient, who perhaps was willing to part with me, too.

Wingate asked, "Where 's Mrs. Faulkner?" and this gave me my chance to get away with dignity.

"She and my wife are off at the Point, looking at the rocks. I 'll go and tell her you 've come."

"Oh, there 's nothing especial. I merely wanted to ask her a few little things. You needn't hurry her back."

He left his place beside me, and went over to Faulkner, whose wrist he took between his fingers. He had dropped it when I looked back, after I left them, and then, with the distinctness that one sense lends another, I partly heard, partly saw him say: "If you don't, it will not only drive you mad; it will kill you."

The doctor's voice came to me in the same key of strenuous, almost angry remonstrance, after I hurried into the lane from the garden, but I could not make out the words any longer.

VIII.

I REACHED the cliff that overlooked the rocks, and stood a moment staring out on that image of eternity; the infinite waters, seasonless, changeless, boundless. The tide was still coming in, with that slow, resistless invasion of the land, which is like the closing in of death upon the borders of life. In successive plunges it pounded on the outer reef, and brawled foaming in over the broken granite shore, lifting and tossing the sea-weed of the boulders, which spread and swayed before it like the hair of drowned Titans and lunged into the hollow murmuring caverns, to suck back again, and pull down a stretch of gravelly beach, with a long snarl of the pebbles torn from their beds. A mist was coming up from the farther ocean; and the sails on the horizon were melting into it.

I saw my wife down on the rocks near the water, with Nevil; on a height nearer me stood Mrs.

Faulkner, fronting seaward, a solitary figure that looked wistful on the peak that lifted and defined her against the curtain of the waters. She was quite motionless, like a statue there. She stirred, and exchanged with those below gesticulations of the gay meaningless sort which people make one another for no reason in the presence of scenes of natural grandeur. She faced about, and at sight of me began instantly to run toward me. I waved to her not to come, and hurried down the rocks to meet her. But I could not stop her, and she was quite breathless when we reached each other.

"What—what is it?" she gasped.

"Nothing whatever!" I returned. "Doctor Wingate is with Mr. Faulkner, and I've profited by the opportunity to come off and admire your rocks. Will you tell me how my wife ever got down there alive, or expects to get back?"

"Does he want me? Did the doctor send for me?"

"Not just at present," I answered her first question. "He asked for you, but he said there was no occasion for hurry?"

"Oh, then, I'll go at once," she said, quite as if I had begged her not to lose a moment.

My wife and Nevil had now caught sight of us together, and started excitedly up the rocks. I waved and beckoned to them in vain; it was a panic. I laughed to see Nevil clamber upward forgetful of my wife, and then, recollecting her, go back, and pull her after him. At one point of his progress he lost his balance, and rolled down to her feet. Mrs. Faulkner laughed hysterically with me, and then began to cry.

"He's up again—he isn't hurt!" I shouted. "Good heavens! What an unnecessary excitement! Didn't you all expect me to come? Did you suppose I could come invisibly?"

"No—no! But we expected Mr. Faulkner with you!"

"Yes, that's all right. But he preferred to remain with the doctor. I should have stayed myself, if I could have imagined the trouble I was going to make."

"I will run on," she said. "You can wait for them."

"Why, there's no occasion for running." But she had already started, and was flying down the long slope that rose to the cliff, and I had no choice but

to wait, and try to keep the others from following her at the same breakneck speed. I was getting angry, and my temper was not improved when my wife called out as soon as she was within ear-shot, "What is it? What is it? Has anything happened?"

"No! Nothing whatever!"

"Then what made you wave to us? You have almost killed us!"

"I waved to stop you."

She did not regard the words. "What is Mrs. Faulkner running so, for?"

"You'd better ask her, if you ever overtake her. *I* don't know. I told her the doctor said she needn't hurry, and she started off like the wind."

"O my goodness! Is the *doctor* there?"

"Really, my dear," I began; but Nevil interposed in time.

"We rather expected him to-day," he said to my wife.

"Oh yes! Mr. Faulkner said so," she recollected. "But of course Mrs. Faulkner is so anxious about her husband that she can't bear to lose a word of what the doctor says to him."

"Well, that's something intelligible," I said, as we moved slowly after her; she was just vanishing into the wilding growth of trees that skirted the old garden. "But you can imagine my astonishment in coming up with a reassuring message, to have it act upon her like a fire-alarm. However, my calming presence seems to have had that effect upon everybody."

Nevil did not concern himself with my personal grievance. In that tumble of his he must have fallen upon some scene of extinct revelry, for he carried on his back a collection of broken egg-shells, clamshells, bits of charred drift-wood, burnt seaweed, and other vestiges of a former clam-bake. "Allow me!" I said, and I brushed some of them off, as he walked and talked along unheeding.

"No one can imagine," he said, "the perpetual tension of her anxiety, her incessant devotion."

"Oh, *I* can!" said my wife, with a meritorious effect of being one of the true faith as regarded Mrs. Faulkner, and of excluding me tacitly from the communion, which I found much harder to bear than Nevil's indifference.

"Oh," I said coolly, "isn't it such as any woman would feel in her circumstances?"

My wife gave me a look that I should have deserved, perhaps, if I had blasphemed.

"No one," said Nevil, "was ever in quite such painful circumstances. If you had seen the strain she is under, as I have, for a whole year, you would understand this."

"Yes, yes. Of course. It's as painful as it can be; but it isn't more painful than the case of many another woman who has seen her husband suffering, and dying by moments under her eyes." I obeyed a perverse impulse to go on and say, though I felt my wife's eyes dwelling in horrified reproach upon me, "I don't mean to depreciate Mrs. Faulkner in any sense, or to question the exquisite poignancy of her trials and her self-sacrifice."

"But you *do*!" said my wife. "You do *both*! You are talking of something you don't know about. If you did, you couldn't—or, I hope at least you wouldn't—talk so."

Nevil said, with the humane wish to mitigate the effect of her severity, "Mrs. March has divined the peculiarly painful feature in the case. It isn't a thing we should have ventured to speak of, if we hadn't somehow seemed to approach it simultaneously."

"You mean," I said, "his aversion to her?"

"Yes!" answered Nevil, in astonishment. "Have you—have *you* noticed it, too?"

"From the first moment I saw them together. But it wasn't a thing I could make sure of until now. I suppose I was waiting to approach it simultaneously, too."

Nevil did not heed the little jibe, and my wife noticed it only to contemn it with a look. "And how do you account for it?" he implored. "How can you explain such a terrible thing? That he should have conceived this unkindness, this repulsion for that hapless creature, whose whole existence is centred in her love of him? Ah, you haven't seen—— There have been times—— I suppose I am speaking to friends of his who feel exactly as I do about him?"

"Oh yes, indeed!" cried my wife, as one in authority for both of us.

"There have been times, within the past six months, and especially during the past month, when, if I hadn't known it was the same man, I could hardly have believed it was Faulkner, in his treatment of her."

"Perhaps it wasn't Faulkner," I suggested.

"You mean that——"

"He isn't himself. You mentioned it."

"Yes. I should be glad to believe that, sometimes, dreadful as it is. It 's so much less dreadful than the idea that he could change toward her in this hour of their dire need and mutual helplessness; and should leave her widowed of his love before she is widowed of his life." Nevil went on, "You couldn't at all appreciate the situation unless you had known them together from the beginning of their acquaintance, as I have. In fact, I was the means of bringing them together; at least I introduced them to each other. With him it was a case of love at first sight. He was much older than she —ten or twelve years; but I don't believe anybody had ever struck Faulkner's fancy before, in spite of all that talk about Miss Ludlow."

"Oh," I said, with a smile of reminiscence, "everybody was expected to be in love with Miss Ludlow and to be rejected by her."

"I 'm sure Faulkner was neither," said Nevil. "You know his romantic nature. He kept it hidden in his public life, but in all his personal relations he

gave it full play. He's a man who has lived the poetry that another man would have written; and he's such a *great* soul that I think it rather pleased him to be that one of the two who must always love the most, in every marriage. To give more love than she gave him, I think he was glad to do that, and that he looked forward to all the future as the field for winning her to a love as perfect as the trust which she had in him. He used to talk with me about it before they were married—you know how boyishly simple-hearted he always was; of course since that, not a syllable. But his victory came sooner than he could have expected. Shortly after their marriage—in fact on their wedding journey to Europe—she fell very sick, and hovered between life and death, for a long time. He made himself her nurse; he wouldn't allow any one else to come near her; he brought her back to health and the full strength of her youth. I don't know whether I ought to repeat a conjecture of Dr. Wingate's—it's merely a conjecture, and Mrs. Faulkner of course has never heard the slightest hint of it. But you know Faulkner was always a delicate fellow, with a force that was entirely nervous; and the doctor

once said to me that he might have developed the tendency he was born with, by overtasking himself in care of her. The bending over, so much, was bad; the lifting, in that posture; and then, when she left her bed, he used to carry her about in his arms, up and down stairs, and everywhere."

"Ah!" sighed my wife, "how cruel life is! But how beautiful, how grand!"

"A nature," I said, without looking at her, "that might impress the casual observer as a mere sop of sentiment, is often capable of that sort of devotion. In fact I suppose that the people we call sentimentalists are merely poets who lack the artistic faculty of expression, and have to live their poetry, as you say, instead of writing it."

I spoke to Nevil, but he replied to my wife, who cried out, "Oh, I hope she'll never know it! I hope she'll die without knowing it!"

"She's a woman who could bear to know it," he said, "if any woman ever could. But if she had known it she could not possibly have lived more singly for him than she has done ever since. I don't know," he went on in a kind of muse, "whether her devotion was love in the usual way. It has always

seemed to me to ignore that, to leave that out of the question; perhaps to take that for granted, as a trivial thing that need hardly be reckoned in the large account. Their not having children, that, too, has kept them in a way, like a young couple; they have had only each other to dedicate themselves to. I don't mean that they have not had higher interests, spiritual interests. Faulkner, you know, has always been a faithful churchman, and Mrs. Faulkner, in her way—it may be your way, too——"

"We are Unitarians," said my wife firmly.

Nevil bowed tolerantly. "Mrs. Faulkner is a very religious person. But one could not live with them, as I have done, for months at a time, and now for a whole year past, without seeing that he was first of all things with her. She was what St. Paul describes the wife to be. She took thought of the things of this world, how she might please her husband. And she did please him. Even after his physical trouble began to show itself—or to be distressing—she made him exquisitely happy, so happy that I trembled for him, knowing that change must come to every state, and since nothing could bring

him more happiness, something must bring him less. And then, this—blight came."

As he spoke Nevil knit his fingers together, and rent them apart in an anguish of pity, of sympathy.

"And you can't imagine—you have no clew—no hint——" my wife began.

"No. No. No. He keeps the horror, whatever it is, wholly to himself. I think if he could tell somebody he could escape it. But he can't! The one thing evident is, that it somehow refers to *her*; and so—he *can't* speak!" We walked on in silence a moment, and then Nevil began again falteringly, "If—if Faulkner, if he had ever shown the slightest question of her—the least anxiety—the smallest wavering, with or without reason, you might suppose it was jealousy, in some suppressed form. But there never was anything of that! He is too noble, too magnanimous for that; he honours her too devoutly. Ah-h-h!"

He went along with his head fallen, and his hands clinging together behind him. We were very near the gate of the old garden. When he reached it he turned and said to us, "I almost dread to see them

together; I always dread to see them: his aversion, and her bewilderment——"

I did not accuse the man of anything wrong in his intense feeling; in my heart I pitied him as the victim of a situation which he ought never to have witnessed, which should have been known only to the two doomed necessarily to suffer in it. I wanted to say to my wife that here was another instance, and perhaps the most odious we could ever know, of the evil of that disgusting three-cornered domestic arrangement which we had both always so cordially reprobated. But I had no chance for that. In fact we found ourselves in the presence of a scene from which we should all have retired, no doubt, if we had known just how. Dr. Wingate was standing in the arbour, looking down at Faulkner, who sat in the place where I had left him. But now his wife sat beside him, and held his hand in her left, while she had drawn his head over on her shoulder with her right. I fancied, from the weak and fallen look of his face, with its closed eyes, that he had just recovered from one of those agonies.

The stir of our feet, or rather the cessation of it as we came involuntarily to a stop in the grass, roused

the group in the arbour. Dr. Wingate and Mrs. Faulkner turned their heads towards us; Faulkner opened his eyes. He remained looking a moment, as if he did not see us. Then his gaze seemed to grow and centre upon Nevil. He flung his wife's hand away, and started suddenly to his feet and made a pace toward us.

She rose, too, and "Ah, Douglas!" she cried out.

He put his hand on her breast and pushed her away with a look of fierce rejection. Then he caught at his own heart; a change, the change that shall come upon every living face, came upon his face. He fell back upon the seat, and his head sank forward.

PART SECOND.—HERMIA.

I.

THE death of Faulkner precipitated in the same compassion all the doubts and reserves of its witnesses. Perhaps one of the reasons why sickness and death are in the world is that they humanise through the sympathies the nature that health and life imbrute. They link in the chain which must one day gall every mortal the strong and happy with the weak and sorrowing, and unite us in the consciousness of a common doom if not the hope of a common redemption. "Some day," each of us tries to realise to himself in their presence, "I shall suffer so; some day I shall lie dumb and cold like that;" and at least we perceive that it is the mystery of our origin speaking to us in those groans, in that silence, of the mystery of our destiny. We have no refuge then but to forget ourselves in pity; and it is sorrow and shame for ever

if we fail of it. The pity of those who saw Faulkner die was not for him. He was swiftly past all that. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, he had been changed. The fire that burned so fiercely, the flame that was the sum of his passions, his hates, his loves had been quenched in a breath; but his end had been such as each of us might desire for himself if he were at peace with himself.

A little wind, cold, keen, stirring the leaves overhead and the long grass underfoot, was coming in from the sea; the sun was growing pale before the rising fog; the roar of the ocean seemed solidly to fill the air. I do not know how long we stood still. All of us knew that Faulkner was dead; no one made the ghastly pretence that he had fallen in a faint; but none of us recognised the fact till my wife, with a burst of tears, took his widow in her arms. Then it was as if we had each wept, and found freedom to move, to speak, to act, by giving way to our grief.

Mrs. March had never before had occasion in our happy life to deal with such an event, and now her instinct of usefulness surprised me; or rather it afterward surprised me, when I thought of it. From

moment to moment she knew what to do, and she knew what to make me do. The doctor, whose office was with life, went away; and the priest, whose calling concerned after-life, was so stunned by what had happened, that he remained helpless in the presence of death. If it had not been for my wife and myself, I hardly know who would have grappled with all those details which present themselves in such a situation with the same imperative claim upon us as eating, drinking, and sleeping, and the other commonplace needs of existence. I was struck by their equality with these; in their order, they came like anything else.

Just before dark my wife sent me back to our children at Lynn. "Poor little things! They will be frightened to death at our staying so long; and you must explain to them as well as you can why I didn't come with you. Mrs. Wakely will get them to bed for you; and be sure that you see they have a light burning in the hall, if they're nervous without it. You won't be needed here. Of course I can't leave her now. You must do the best you can without me."

"Yes; yes," I said. "But how strange, Isabel, that we should be mixed up with these unhappy

people in this way! Do you remember the critical mood in which we came here to-day?"

"Yes, perhaps we've always been too critical, and held ourselves too much aloof—tried to escape ties."

"Death won't let us escape them, even if life will," I answered, and for the first time I had a perception of the necessary solidarity of human affairs from the beginning to the end, in which no one can do or be anything to himself alone. "It makes very little difference now what that poor man's taste in literature and art was. It seems a great while ago since we smiled at him for it. Was it only this morning?"

"This morning? It seems a thousand years—in some pre-existence."

"Why, it *was* in a pre-existence for *him*!"

"Yes, how strange that is!"

II.

I DID not see Wingate again till I met him at our first dinner in the fall. Then, as we sat at our corner together, with our comfortable little cups of black coffee before us, at a sufficient distance from the others, who had broken up the order of the table, and grouped themselves in twos and threes for the good talk that comes last at such a time, we began to speak of the Faulkners. They had probably been in both our minds, vaguely and vividly, the whole evening. He asked me if I had heard anything from Mrs. Faulkner lately; and I said, Oh yes; my wife heard from her pretty often, though irregularly; and I told him how, with every intention and prepossession to the contrary, my wife had grown into what I might call an intimate friendship with her. The widow had gone back to the city where Faulkner and I had lived together, and had taken up her life again in the

old place, with the old surroundings and the old associations.

"Then you were not especially intimate with him when you lived there?"

"No," I said, "it was a friendly acquaintance for a while, and then it was an unfriendly non-acquaintance;" and I explained how. "To tell you the truth, I never cared a great deal for him; and I was surprised to find that he seemed to care a good deal for me; though perhaps what seemed affection for me was only the appeal for sympathy that a dying man addresses to the whole earth."

"Perhaps," said the doctor.

"I hope I don't appear very cold-hearted. I liked his friend the parson a great deal better, and for no more reason than I liked Faulkner less. Faulkner was a sentimental idealist; he tried to live the rather high-strung literature that he might have written if his lot had been cast in a literary community. You understand?"

"Yes."

"I have known several such men in the West; they're rather characteristic of a new country."

"Yes; I can understand how. I didn't know but

you had been intimate," said Wingate, in a half tone of disappointment.

I recognised it with a laugh. "Well, Faulkner was intimate, doctor, if I wasn't. Will that serve the purpose?"

"I'm not sure." The doctor broke off the ash of his cigar on the edge of his saucer. "I should like to ask one thing," he said.

"Ask away!"

He hitched his chair nearer me, setting it sidewise of the table, on which he rested his left arm, and then dropped his face on his lifted hand. "That day, just before I came, had he been telling you his dream?"

"No."

The doctor now used a whole tone of disappointment. "Well, I'm sorry. I should have liked to talk it over with you."

"You can't be half so sorry as I am. I should like immensely to talk it over. I always had a fancy that his dream killed him."

"Oh no! oh no!" said the doctor, with a smile at my unscientific leap to the conclusion.

"Hastened it, then."

"We can't say, very decidedly, whether a death is hastened or not—that kind. The man was destined to die soon, and to die what is called suddenly. He might have died at that very moment and in that precise way if he had never had any such dream. Undoubtedly it wore upon him. But I should say it was an effect rather than a cause of his condition. There 's where you outsiders are apt to make your mistakes in these recondite cases. You want something dramatic—like what you 've read of—and you 're fond of supposing that a man's trouble of mind caused his disease, when it was his disease caused his trouble of mind: the physical affected the moral, and not the moral the physical."

"You mean that his mind was clouded?"

The doctor laughed. "No, I didn't mean that. But it 's true, all the same. His mind was clouded, by the pain he had suffered, perhaps, and his dream came out of the cloud in his mind. If he had lived, it would have resulted in mania, as I told him substantially that day. But it was very curious, its recurrence and its unvarying circumstantiality. I don't know that I ever knew anything *just* like it; though there 's a kind of similarity in all these cases."

I saw that Wingate would like to tell me what Faulkner's dream was; but I knew that he would not do so unless he could fully justify the confidence to his professional conscience. I said to myself that I should not tempt him, but I tried to tempt him. "He told you how long he had been having his dream?"

The doctor appeared not to have heard my question. "And you say she has gone back to their old place?"

"Yes, and to every circumstance of their life as nearly as possible." I did not like his running away with my bait in that fashion very well, but I thought it best to give him all the line he wanted, and then play him back as I could. "You know—but of course you don't know—that his mother always lived with them when they were at home—or they lived with her; it was the old lady's house, I believe; and the widow has even repeated that feature of their former ménage, and has her mother-in-law with her."

"And what's become of the parson?"

"The parson? Oh—Nevil! Nevil's given up his parish there, and gone further West—to Kansas, where he has charge of a sort of mission church—I

don't understand the mechanism of those things very well—and is doing some good work. I believe he has ritualised somewhat. That seems to be the way with them when they take to practical Christianity. Curious; but it 's so."

"And she lives with her mother-in-law," the doctor mused aloud. "Property tied up so she had to?"

"No. I think not. It seems to be quite her own choice. I dare say they get on very well. The old lady is romantic, I believe, like Faulkner; and probably she 's in love with her daughter-in-law."

"Well," said the doctor, "it isn't a situation that every woman could reconcile herself to, under the best conditions. But if she thought she ought to do it, she would do it. She has pluck enough. I should like to tell you one thing," and the doctor hitched his chair a little closer as he said this, and again he broke the ash of his cigar off on his saucer.

He did not go on at once, and, lest it might be for want of prompting, I said, "Well?"

"I don't know whether this is something your wife ever knew about or not?" he began askingly.

"Really, I can't say," I answered impatiently, "till I know myself."

He did not mind my impatience, but pulled comfortably at his cigar for a moment before he went on. "She came to my office with her."

"When they went to see you just before she started West? I understood she called on business."

"To pay my bill? Yes, and then she asked to see me alone. I suppose your wife thought she wished to consult me; and so did I. But it wasn't the usual kind of consultation; in fact she wasn't the usual kind of woman! She didn't lose an instant; she went right at me. 'Doctor,' said she, 'do you know what was on my husband's mind?' I like to deal with any one I can be honest with, and I saw I could be honest with her. 'Yes,' I said, 'he told me.' She caught her breath a little, and then said she, 'Can you tell me the form, the kind of trouble it was?' 'Yes,' I said, 'it was a dream. A dream that kept coming, again and again, and finally had begun to colour his waking thoughts and impressions.' She gave another gasp—I can see her now, just how she looked with the black crape round her face, all pale and washed out with weeping—and then she asked, 'Did it relate to—me?' 'Yes,' I said, 'it related to you, Mrs. Faulkner,'

She came right back at me. 'Doctor Wingate,' said she, 'is it something that he could ever have told me, if he had lived?' I had to think a while before I said, 'No, as I understood his character, I don't think he ever could.' She came right back again—I could see that she had made up her mind to go through it all in a certain way, and that she was ready for anything—and said she, 'I know that whatever it was, he was always struggling against it; and that when it forced itself upon him, he did not believe it at the bottom of his heart. I have seen that; and now I will only ask you one thing more. Is it something that for his sake—not for mine, remember!—you wouldn't wish me to know?' 'I would rather you wouldn't know it, for his sake,' said I. 'Then,' said she, 'that is all,' and she got up, and put out her hand to me, and gave mine a grip as strong as a man's, and went out."

"Splendid!" I said, overmastering my own disappointment, and wishing that in my interest Mrs. Faulkner had been a little less heroic.

"Splendid?" said Wingate. "It was superhuman! Or superwoman. Just think of the burden she shouldered for life! I don't know how

much or how little she had divined, but all the worse if she had divined anything. She denied herself the satisfaction of her curiosity, and left me to make whatever I chose of her motives. She didn't explain; she simply asked and acted. I might suspect this, or I might suppose that; she left me free. I never saw such nerve. It was superb."

"Perhaps a little topping," I suggested.

"Yes, perhaps a little topping," the doctor consented. "But still, it was a toppingness that could have consisted only with the most perfect conscience, the most absolute freedom from self-reproach in every particular."

"C'était magnifique, mais ce n'était pas la guerre. I think I should have preferred a little more human nature in mine. I should have liked her better if she had gone down on her knees to you, and begged you tell her what it was; and when you had told her, if it inculpated her at all, would never have left you till you had exculpated her. That would have been more like a woman."

"Yes, much more like most women," said the doctor. "But the type is not the nation, or the race, or the sex. The type is cheap, dirt cheap. It's

the variation from the type that is the character, the individual, the valuable and venerable personality"

"Since when did you set up hero-worship, doctor? Really, you're worse than my wife. But I expect her to be worse than you when I tell her this story of Mrs. Faulkner. I suppose you will let me tell her?"

"Oh yes. I suppose you would tell her whether I let you or not."

"There's always a danger of that kind," I admitted.

"I wonder," said Wingate, "whether the eagerness of women to hear things isn't a natural result from the eagerness of men to tell them."

"Possibly they may have spoiled us in that way. Do you think you were as eager not to tell as Mrs. Faulkner was not to hear?"

The doctor laughed tolerantly.

III.

I WAS surprised at the way my wife took the doctor's story when I repeated it to her the next morning at breakfast.

"Well," she said, "that is the first thing I've ever heard of Mrs. Faulkner that I don't like."

"It was certainly a base treason to her sex to go back on its reputation for curiosity in that manner."

"Oh, it was enough like a woman to do that—a certain kind of woman."

"The *poseuse*?"

"The worse than *poseuse*. The kind of woman that overtasks her strength, and breaks down with what she's undertaken, and makes us all ridiculous, and discourages us from trying to bear what we really could bear."

"Doctor Wingate admires her immensely for her courage in trying it."

"And I suppose you admire her too."

"No. When it comes to that, I'm all woman—the kind of woman that wouldn't attempt more than she could perform, unless she could get some man to carry out her enterprise for her. But perhaps she might do that."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't mean *what*, at all. I mean *whom*. Nevil."

"Basil," said my wife, "when you talk that way you make me lose all respect for you. No. She may be too exalted, but at least she isn't degraded."

"She couldn't very well be both," I admitted.

"And it shows what a really low idea you have of women, my dear. I'm sorry for you."

"Bless my soul! Why do you object to her being superwoman, as Wingate says, in one way, and not superwoman in another?"

"We both agreed, from the very beginning, that that ridiculous friendship was entirely between him and Faulkner. I think it was as silly as it could be, and weak, and sentimental in all of them. She ought to have put a stop to it; but with him so sick as he was, of course she had to yield, and then be subjected to—to anything that people were mean enough to think."

"Why not say base enough, vile enough, grovelling enough, crawling-in-the-mire enough?"

"Very well, then, I *will* say that. And I will say that any one who will insinuate such a thing is as bad—as bad as Faulkner himself."

"But not so much to blame, I hope. At least I didn't bring Nevil into his family."

"You admired him!"

"Yes, if I may say it without further offence, I liked him. I pitied him; it seemed to me that he was the chief victim of Faulkner's fondness. He couldn't get away without inhumanity; but I believe he was thoroughly bored by the situation. He felt it to be ridiculous."

"And she, what did she think of it?"

"I don't believe she thought of it at all. She was preoccupied with her husband. He had to stay and simply look on, and see her suffer, because he couldn't get away. It was an odious predicament."

"Yes. I think it was too," said my wife. "And I felt sorry for him, though I didn't admire him. And I must say that he escaped from his false position as quickly and as completely as possible."

"Ah, I don't know that I've altogether liked his

leaving the town. That looked, if anything, a little conscious. I should have preferred his staying and living it all down."

"There was nothing to live down!"

"No; nothing."

"You are talking so detestably," said my wife; "that I've got a great mind not to tell you something."

I folded my hands in supplication. "Oh, I will behave! I will behave! Don't keep anything more from me, my dear. Think what I've endured already from the fortitude of Mrs. Faulkner!"

"The letter came last night, by the last distribution, after you'd gone to your dinner," said Mrs. March, feeling in her pocket for it, which was always a work of time: a woman has to rediscover her pocket whenever she uses it. "He's engaged."

"Who?"

"Who? Mr. Nevil. Now, what do you have to say?"

I threw myself forward in astonishment. "What! Already! Why it isn't six months since——"

"Basil!" cried my wife, in a voice of such terrible warning that I was silent. I had to humble myself

very elaborately, after that. Even then it was with great hauteur and distance that she said, "He's engaged to a young lady of his parish out there. The letter's from Mrs. Faulkner." She tossed it across the table to me with a disdain for my low condition that would have wounded a less fallen spirit. But I was glad of the letter on any terms, and I eagerly pulled it open and flattened it out.

"Just read it aloud, please," commanded my wife, from her remote height, and I meekly obeyed.

"'DEAR MRS. MARCH,—You will be surprised to get a letter from me so soon after the last I wrote; but I have a piece of news which has excited us all here a good deal, and which I think will interest you and Mr. March. Mr. Nevil has just written my mother, Mrs. Faulkner, of his engagement.'

"What an astonishing woman!" I broke off. "Why in the world didn't she keep it for the post-script, after she had palavered over forty or fifty pages about nothing?"

"Because," said my wife, "she isn't an ordinary woman in any way. Go on."

I went on.

"'His letter is rather incoherent, of course. But

he tells us she is very young, and he encloses a photograph to show us that she is pretty. She is more than that, however; she is a beautiful girl; but the photograph does not paint character, and so we have to take Mr. Nevil's word for the fact that she is very good, and cultivated, and affectionate.'"

"Affectionate, of course!" I broke off again; and my wife came down from her high horse long enough to laugh; and then instantly got back again.

"'He seems very much in love, and we feel as happy as we can about him without knowing his *fiancée*. He has been so long like a son to Mrs. Faulkner, that of course it is a little pang to her, but she reconciles herself to losing him by thinking of his good. I am thoroughly glad, for I think his life was very lonely, and that he longed for companionship. He is of a very simple nature—you cannot always see it under the ecclesiasticism—and I think he has missed Douglas almost as much as we have. He hints in his letter that if Douglas were living, and the old place here could welcome him as of old, he could wish for no other home.'"

"Look here, Isabel!" I broke off again. "These seem to me rather wild and whirling words. If Mrs.

Faulkner *mère* is so very happy, why does she have a little pang and have to brace up by thinking of his good? And if Mr. Nevil is so very ecstatic about his betrothed, why does he intimate that if the old home of his friends could still be his, he would not want a new home of his own?"

"That is very weak in him," my wife admitted.

"Yes; let's hope the future Mrs. Nevil may never get hold of that letter of his. She probably hates the very name of Faulkner already."

"If you will go on," said my wife, "you will see what Hermia says of all that."

"Hannah," I corrected her; but I went on.

"'I suppose,'" the letter ran, "'that this is the last of Mr. Nevil, as far as we are concerned. I could not adopt his old friends, if I were in her place, and I am persuading Mrs. Faulkner to disappear out of his life as promptly and as voluntarily as possible, after his marriage. I know that this is one of the things that men laugh at us for; but I cannot help it, and I grieve to think now that I could not help showing poor Douglas that his friends were less welcome to me than they were to him. Mrs. Faulkner sees the matter as I do; but she will have

to play the part of mother-in-law at least so far as the infare is concerned. Mr. Nevil has no relations of his own (he is the most bereft and orphaned person I ever knew), and she has asked him to bring his bride here as he would to his mother's house. Of course, it will all be very quiet; but we must go through some social form of welcome. The marriage is to be very soon—in a month. I will write you about it.'"

I folded up the letter and gave it back to Mrs. March.

"Now, what have you got to say?" she demanded.

"I? Oh! May I ask why you didn't tell me about this letter in the beginning, instead of allowing me to go on with my defamatory conjectures?"

"I wanted to see you cover yourself with confusion; I wished to give you a lesson."

"Pshaw, Isabel! You know that you were so curious about what Wingate told me that it put the letter all out of your head."

"And do you say now," she retorted, quite as if she had got the better of me, and were making one triumph follow upon another, "do you still mean to

say that she expected to get him to help her bear the—the shadow of Faulkner's dream?"

"Isn't that rather attenuating it?" I asked. But upon reflection I found that the phrase accurately expressed the case. "Why, yes, that's just what it is. It's the burden of a shadow! In spite of Wingate's scientific reluctances, I believe that it crushed poor Faulkner; and I'm glad the weight of it isn't to fall upon her or upon Nevil. Weight! Why, Isabel, that letter has simply removed mountains from my mind! And the affair was really none of my business, either."

"Yes, I'm glad it's all over," said my wife, with a sigh of relief. "Now I *can* respect her without the slightest reservation."

"And isn't it strange," I suggested, "that this kind of burden she can bear alone, but if she had divided it with him she could not bear it?"

"Yes, it's strange," she answered. "And, as you say, this letter is a great relief. Dr. Wingate may account for it all on scientific grounds if he chooses, and say that Faulkner's disease caused the dream, and not the dream his disease. But if this had not happened, if this engagement did not give the lie so

distinctly to the worst that we ever thought when we thought our worst about it, I never could have felt exactly easy. There would always have been, don't you know, the misgiving that there was a consciousness of something drawing them together during his life that frightened them apart after his death. But now I feel *perfectly* sure!"

There had never been any doubt with us as to the nature of Faulkner's dream, though we could only conjecture its form and facts. Sometimes these appeared to us very gross and palpable, and again merely a vaguely accusing horror, a ghastly adumbration, a mere sensation, a swiftly vanishing impression. We had talked it over a great deal at first, and then it had faded more and more out of our minds. We had our own cares, our own concerns, which were naturally first with us; and I feel that in giving the idea of our preoccupation with those of others, however interesting, however fascinating, I am contributing to one of those false effects of perspective which have always annoyed me in history. The events of the past are pressed together in that retrospect, as if the past were entirely composed of events, and not, like the present,

of long intermediate stretches and spaces of eventlessness, which the rapidly approaching lines and the vanishing-point can give no hint of. In spite of everything, since the story only secondarily concerns ourselves, we must appear concerned in it alone, though for that very reason we ought to be able to seem what we really were: spectators giving it a sympathetic and appreciative glance now and then, while we kept about our own business.

IV.

For a while we expected with vivid interest Mrs. Faulkner's account of the infare, and her description of the bride, and of the bridegroom in his new relations. Then we ceased to talk of it, and I, at least, forgot all about it. The time for her letter had passed when it came, and then we reckoned up the weeks since the last one came, and found that this was almost a month overdue. When we had ascertained this fact, my wife opened the letter, and began to snatch a phrase from this page and another from that, turning to the last and returning to the first, in that provoking way women have with a letter, instead of reading it solidly through from beginning to end. As she did this I saw her eyes dilate, and she grew more and more excited.

"Well, well?" I called out to her, when this spectacle became intolerable.

"Oh, my *dear*, my dear!" she answered, and

went on snatching significant fragments from the letter.

"What is it? Doesn't the bride suit? Was Nevil too silly about her? Were the dresses from Worth's? Or what's the matter?"

"The engagement—the engagement is *off!* Nevil is perfectly killed by it, and he's back on their hands, down sick, and they're taking care of him. Oh, horrors *upon* horrors! I never heard of anything so dreadful! And the details—well, the whole thing is simply inexpressible!"

"Suppose you give Mrs. Faulkner a chance at the inexpressible. I'd rather hear of the calamity at first hands and in a mass, than have it doled out to me piecemeal by a third person, and snatched back at every mouthful." I put out my hand for the letter, and after a certain hesitation my wife gave it me.

"Well, see what *you* can make of it."

"I shall make nothing of it; I shall leave that to the facts."

These appeared to be that the engagement had gone on like other engagements up to a certain point. The preparations were made; the dresses

were bought; the presents were provided, presumably with the usual fatuity and reluctance; the cards were out; the day was fixed. All this had gone forward with no hint of misgiving from the young lady. She seemed excited, Nevil could remember, but to seem excited in such circumstances was to seem natural. Suddenly, a week before the day fixed for the wedding she discovered that she had make a mistake: she could never have truly loved him, and now she was sure that she did not love him at all. She was not fit to be a clergyman's wife; she never could make him happy. He must release her; that was the substance of it; but there were decorative prayers to be forgiven and forgotten and accepted in the relation of a friend. She was the only daughter of rich and vulgar parents, and her father added a secret anguish to Nevil's open shame by offering to make it right with him in any sum he would name; the millionaire wished to act handsomely. Nevil could perhaps have borne both the secret anguish and the open shame; but the Sunday edition of the leading newspaper of the place found the affair a legitimate field of journalistic enterprise. It gave column after

column of imagined and half-imagined detail; it gave biographical sketches of what it called the high retracting parties; it gave Nevil's portrait, the young lady's portrait, the portraits of the young lady's parents. It was immensely successful, and it drove Nevil out of town. He came back crushed and broken to his old home, and sought refuge with his old friends from the disgrace of his wrong. He would not see any one but the doctor, outside of their house; he was completely prostrated. The worst of it was that he seemed really to have been in love with the girl, whom he believed to have been persuaded by her parents to break off the match; though he could not understand why they should have allowed her to go so far. Mrs. Faulkner had her own opinions on this point, which she expressed in her letter, and they were to the effect that the girl was weak and fickle, but that she was right in thinking she never had loved him, however wrong she had been in once thinking differently. This could not be suggested for Nevil's comfort, and they were obliged tacitly to accept his theory of the matter; he could not bear to think slightingly of her. In fact, it had been a perfect infatuation, and

it had been all the more complete because Nevil, though past thirty-five, had never been in love before, and gave himself to his passion with the ardour of an untouched heart, and the strength of a manhood matured in the loftiest worship, and the most childlike ignorance of women, and especially girls. This was what Mrs. Faulkner gathered at second-hand from his talk with her mother-in-law; and she found herself embarrassed in deciding just how to treat the bruised and broken man, so strangely cast upon their compassion. He wanted to talk with her about his misery, but it seemed to her that she ought not to let him; and yet she could not well avoid it, when he turned to her with such a confident expectation of her sympathy. It was very awkward having him in the house; but they could not turn him out of doors; and he clung to Douglas's mother with all the trusting helplessness of a sick son. It was pathetic to see a man who had once been to her the very embodiment of strong common-sense and spiritual manliness, so weak and helpless. The doctor said he must get away as soon as he could; and he had better go to Europe and travel about. But Nevil

was poor; they could send him, of course, and would be glad to do so; but he was sensitive about money, and had none of that innocent clerical willingness to take it.

The letter closed rather abruptly with civil remembrances to me.

"Isn't it cruel, dear?" my wife said pleadingly, as if to forestall any ironical view I might be inclined to take of the case.

"Yes, it is cruel," I answered quite in earnest, and we went on to talk it over in all the lights. We said, what a strange thing it was, in the distribution of sorrow and trouble, that this one should receive blow after blow, all through life, and that one go untouched from the beginning to the end. Any man would have thought that Mrs. Faulkner had certainly had her share of suffering in her husband's sickness and death, without having this calamity of his friend laid upon her; for in the mystery of our human solidarity it was clear that she must help him support it. But apparently God did not think so; or was existence all a miserable chance, a series of stupid, blundering accidents? We could not believe that; for our very souls' sake,

and for our own sanity we must not. We who were nowhere when the foundations of the earth were laid, and knew not who had laid the measures of it, or stretched the line upon it, could only feel that our little corner of cognition afforded no perspective of the infinite plan; and we left those others to their place in it, not without commiseration, but certainly without trying to account for what had happened to them, or with any hope of ever offering a justification of it.

V.

THE situation, which seemed to our despondent philosophy tragically permanent, was of course only a transitory phase; and we quickly had news of a change. Nevil had grown better; he had been invited to resume his former charge, with a year's leave of absence for travel, and the complete recovery of his health. The sort of indignant tenderness with which all his old friends had taken up his cause against his cruel fate had gone far to console and restore him. Mrs. Faulkner spoke of his joy in their affection as something very beautiful, and she dwelt upon the pleasure it gave them to see the old Nevil coming back day by day, in the old unselfish manliness. He had been troubled in his depression by the consciousness that it was ignoble to give way to it, and his courage was rising with his strength to resist. But still it was thought best for him to go abroad and complete his recovery by

an entire change ; and he was going very soon. He had accepted the means from his people as an advance of salary for services which he expected to render, and so the obstacle of his poverty and pride was got over.

I cannot say that it pleased us greatly to learn that Nevil thought of sailing from Boston, and hoped to see us ; but we had our curiosity to satisfy, as well as our intangible obligation of hospitality to fulfil, and my wife wrote asking him to our house for such time as he should have between arriving and departing. He was delayed in one way or other so that he came in the morning, and sailed at noon ; she did not meet him at all, but I went over to the ship in East Boston, and saw him off, and then gave her such report of him as I could. I am afraid it was rather vague. I said he seemed shy, as if he were embarrassed by his knowledge that I knew his story ; he seemed a little cold ; he seemed a little more clerical. I suppose I had really expected him to speak with intense feeling of the Faulkners, and that it disappointed me when he only mentioned them in giving me the messages they had sent. I do not know why I should have felt repelled,

almost hurt by his manner; but I dare say it was because I had met him so full of a sympathy which I could not express, and which he could not recognise. I was aware afterward of having derived my mood rather from Mrs. Faulkner's representations of him than from my own recollections. Perhaps I had a romantic wish to behold a man whom the waters had passed over, and who gave evidence of what he had undergone. But Nevil appeared as he had always appeared to me: pure, gentle, serene; not broken, not bruised, and by no means prepared for the compassion which I was prepared to lavish upon him. I did not reflect that the intimacy had proceeded much more rapidly on my part than on his.

He was in company with a wealthy parishioner, and he presented me as a fellow-Westerner. His friend ordered some champagne in celebration of this fact and of the parting hour, and we had it in their large state-room, the captain's room, which the parishioner was very proud of having secured. He filled Nevil's glass slowly, so that he should lose nothing in mere effervescence, and said, "Doctor's orders, you know." He explained to me that for

his own part he did not care about Europe; he had seen too much of it; but he was going along to watch out that Nevil took care of himself.

My wife was even less satisfied with this interview at second-hand than I was at first-hand. She insisted that I should search my conscience and say whether I had not met Nevil with too great effusion, which he might justly resent as patronising. I brought myself in not guilty of this crime, and then she said she had always thought he was tepid and limited, and she was disposed to console herself by finding in my rebuff, as she called it, a just punishment for my having liked Nevil so much. "You can see by that champagne business," she said, "that, after all, he 's just as much a Westerner at heart as Faulkner. I doubt if he was so much hurt by that newspaper notoriety of his broken engagement as he pretended to be."

I admitted that he was a fraud in every respect, and that he had been guilty of something very like larceny in depriving her of a hero. "But," I said, "you have your heroine left."

"Yes, thank goodness! *She 's* a *woman!*"

"A heroine usually is—unless she 's an angel."

Nevil was gone a year, and during this time the correspondence between Mrs. Faulkner and Mrs. March, fevered to an abnormal activity by recent events, fell back into the state of correspondence in health which tends to an exchange of apologies for not having written. Mrs. Faulkner's letters contained some report of Nevil's movements: and we had got so used to his being abroad that it seemed very sudden when one came saying that he had got home, perfectly well, and had gone at once to work in his parish, with all his old energy. She sent some newspapers with marked notices of him; and then it seemed to me that we heard nothing more from her till the next spring, when a most joyful letter burst upon us, as it were, with the announcement of her engagement to Nevil.

I cannot say exactly what it was about this fact that shocked us both. The affair, superficially, was in every way right and proper. We were sure that as Hermia reported Faulkner's mother was as happy in it as herself, and that it was the just and lawful recompense of suffering that Hermia and Nevil had jointly and severally undergone for no wrong or fault of theirs; we ought to have been glad for

them; and yet, somehow, we could not; somehow we were not reconciled to that comfortable close for the most painful passage of life we had ever witnessed. Instead of being the end of trouble, it seemed like the beginning. It brought up again with dreadful vividness all the experiences of that day when Faulkner died. It was as if he rose from the dead, and walked the earth again in the agony of body we had seen, and the anguish of mind we had imagined. Once more I saw him, with a face full of hate, push her from him, and fall back and gasp and die.

Hermia's letter came in the morning; and during the forenoon I received a telegram at my office from her asking if Dr. Wingate were in Boston. I sent out and found that the doctor was at home, and answered accordingly. Then I sent the telegram to my wife, and hurried away from the office rather early in the afternoon, to learn what she made of it.

She had just got a telegram herself from Mrs. Faulkner, saying that she should start for Boston by the eleven o'clock train that night, and asking if she might come to our house.

VI.

The general change in Hermia, no less than a phase of her character which had never before shown itself to us, struck me at the station where I went to meet her on the arrival of her train; and when I brought her home, I saw that she affected my wife in the same way. Personally we had known her only as the submissive and patient subject of an invalid's sick will, anxious to devote herself to the gratification of his whims. We remembered her as all gentleness, abeyance, self-effacement, and then as a despair so quiet that the wildest grief would have been less pathetic to witness. From Wingate's report of her interview with him we had inferred a strength which was rather hysterical; and though her letters of the last two years had given us the impression of a clear and just mind, able to decide impartially from uncommon insight, we had still kept our old idea of her, and thought only of the

self-abnegation we had seen, and the somewhat abnormal self-assertion of which we had heard.

She now appeared younger than before, which I suppose was an effect of her having really grown thinner; and with her return to her youthful figure she had acquired an elastic vigour which we did not perceive at once to be moral rather than physical. It was when we fairly saw her face in the light of the half-hour which we had with her before dinner that we knew this was the spirit's school of the body; and that underneath her power over herself was a weakness that had to be constantly watched and disciplined. She was like an athlete who knows the point in which lies the danger of his failure, and who guards and fortifies it. I am aware that this gives a false and theatrical complexion to the simple truth that touched and fascinated us; but I do not know how otherwise to express it; and I am not able to describe as I would like the appearance of a great happiness suddenly arrested and held in check, which we both believed we saw in her. It was this, I fancy, that kept us silent with those congratulations upon her engagement which we should both have felt it fit to offer. To tell the whole truth, we

were a little quelled and overawed by the resolute strength of which she gave the effect, and we left it for her, if she would, to enlarge the circle of our talk from the commonplaces of her journey East, and her ability to sleep on the cars, and of her health, and Mrs. Faulkner's health, and ours; and include an emotional region where Nevil should at least be named. But she did not mention him, and she only departed from these safe generalities in asking if we could probably see Dr. Wingate that evening.

I said that he had no office hours in the evening, but I knew he was to be found at home between half-past seven and nine, and we might chance it.

"I must see him to-night," she answered quietly, "and I wish you and Mrs. March would come with me. It's a matter that I may want you to know about. I may need—need"—she faltered a breath—"your help."

"Why, of course," said my wife; and then I had one of my inspirations, as she called them.

I said, "Why not send a messenger round for Dr. Wingate to come here? It will catch him at dinner, and then we can make sure of him," and I modestly evaded the merit I might have acquired through this

suggestion, by going off to ring for a messenger, who arrived, of course, just when we had forgotten him, and made my wife believe it was the doctor.

We had a moment together before dinner for the exchange of impressions and conjectures, and I made my little objections to the hardship of being involved again in Mrs. Faulkner's affairs. "What do you suppose she meant by needing our help? Really I think I must be excused from being present at her consultation of Dr. Wingate! If she's going to break down on our hands——"

My wife saw the parody of her customary anxieties in the presence of any aspect of the unexpected. "Nonsense! It's nothing of that kind, poor thing! If it only were! But it's something that's on her mind — that Dr. Wingate knows about and she doesn't. And now the time's come when she must."

"Do you mean—the dream?"

"Yes. Or something connected with it. I saw it in an instant. Well, she's got her punishment!"

"Her punishment? What in the world is she punished for?"

"For trying to bear more than she could. For trying not to know what she must know before she

could really ever take another step in life. I suppose at that time she expected to die. But she lived."

"Ah, that's a mistake we often make!"

"Yes, she could have borne it if nothing else had happened after that."

"But something else happened."

"And now she has to provide for this world instead of the next."

"Poor mortality!" I sighed. "Between the two worlds, how its difficulties are multiplied."

VII.

Dr. Wingate arrived with his professional face, in which I fancied a queer interrogation of mine. Then I said, "It's Mrs. Faulkner who wishes to see you. You remember? She's here with us."

But he only asked, "How long has she been in town?" and he gave a poke or two at his hair after taking his hat off in the hall, where I went out to meet him when I heard his ring.

"Since four o'clock."

"Oh!"

"She was anxious to see you at once, and I made bold to send for you, instead of taking the chance of not finding you in."

"Oh, that's all right," he said, and he rubbed his hands with an air of impatience which decided me not to tell him, as I had imagined myself doing, of her engagement to Nevil by way of preparation. I

saw that it was not my affair; and I decided not to put my fingers between the bark and the tree.

He preceded me into the library, where Mrs. Faulkner sat waiting with my wife, and I saw him make a special effort to temper his bluff directness with a kindly deference. It was she who was brusque, and who put aside the preliminaries which he would have interposed.

"Doctor Wingate, I have come to Boston to see you in the hope that you can help me. But now I almost think that no one can help me. You can't change the truth!"

"Rather an undertaking, Mrs. Faulkner, I admit," he said, with a smile for her exaltation. "But it depends somewhat upon the nature of the truth. I have known cases in which I could change the truth *back*. They're not so very uncommon." He looked at her with smiling insinuation, and she smiled pathetically in response.

"This isn't one of that kind," she said, and she had to make the effort of beginning afresh. "Do you remember when I came to you just—just after my husband's death; and spoke to you about the dream that killed him?"

"The dream didn't kill him," said Wingate. "But I remember the interview you refer to." He looked round at my wife and me, and then at Hermia, as if to question whether it was really her intention that we should be present, and we both made an instinctive motion to rise.

"Don't go," she said. "I wish you to stay. I was afraid, then, to face it alone, and now I wish to know what it was. Oh yes! I made a feint of refusing to know it for his sake. I believed that I was sincere, but I was a miserable hypocrite. I was sparing myself, not him. Now, all that must come to an end. I ask you to tell me what his dream was, and to tell it in the presence of those who saw him suffer from it, *die* of it." Wingate opened his mouth to protest again, but she hurried on. "You said then that his dream concerned me, and I want them to judge me by it, and I will judge myself by their judgment."

"Really, Mrs. Faulkner," said Wingate, with the laugh of a man whose perplexity passes any other expression, "you are almost as bad as *he* was! Where shall I begin? How much can you bear? The whole thing's very painful! Why must you

know it now, when you 've held out against it so bravely, so wisely, for two years?"

"Because," she answered, as if she had prepared herself for some such question, "I was going to take a great step, and I wished to look at every thought and fact of my life, to be sure that I was worthy to take such a step. I got to thinking of that dream, which you said concerned me; and I found that I could have no peace, no certainty of the kind I wanted till I knew what it was. I must have been —there must have been something in me—terribly wrong, terribly bad, to have inspired such a dream, and——"

"Ah-h-h!" the doctor broke out, "you're as wild as he was in that reasoning," and to both of us men her logic was pitiably childlike; but I could see that for my wife it had a force inappreciable to us, because she was a woman too; no doubt she would judge Hermia as severely as she judged herself. "What you say," the doctor went on, "is perfectly monstrous, and I should not feel justified in telling you anything about it, unless I could bring you to see the matter in a reasonable light. And, in the first place, I want you to realise that

whatever you were, or whatever you were not, it had absolutely no more to do with his dream, than the character of an inhabitant of Saturn, if there is one. Why, just consider! You wish to judge yourself, and if possible condemn yourself—I can see that!—for something he dreamed about you; and yet I suppose you dream things about others—we all do!—that dishonour and defame them, without thinking evil of them for it?"

I laughed. "Why, of course!" but the two women were silent.

My wife said finally, "Why, of course, we don't blame them for it; but we can't *feel* exactly the same toward them afterward; and if I knew that a person had such a dream about me, I should not be comfortable till—till——"

"Till you knew just why they had it," I suggested; and I tried to lighten the situation with another laugh.

Hermia gave my wife a grateful look for her sympathy, quite as if it had eased her of her self-accusal, instead of darkening her case against herself, and asked the doctor, "Did his dream dishonour me—defame me—to you?"

"No!" the doctor cried out. "I did not say that. His dream concerned you, and it distressed him; but I couldn't say that it was one to make me or any one think wrong of you. Now, won't that do! Isn't that enough?"

"No," said Hermia, "it isn't enough. I must be judge of whether I was guilty of anything wrong, and I must know what his dream accused me of. Why did it keep coming and coming?"

"How do you know it kept coming and coming?"

"Because I know. Because—because—— His mother and I were looking over some things he had left—I wished to do it—letters and papers; and we found a scrap that said—that said—that spoke of his having a dream, and how he had been dreaming the same thing for months, sometimes every night, sometimes once a week. And I can remember how he would be very good to me for days, and then some morning he would not speak to me or hardly look at me; so that—so that I was afraid his mind——"

"Did you keep that scrap?" Wingate interrupted.

Hermia took it out of her pocket where she must have been keeping her hand upon it, and gave it him. He read it over, glanced again at the characters, and handed it back to her.

"If you needed any proof of what I must say to you now, Mrs. Faulkner," he began very gravely and tenderly, "you could get it of the first alienist whom you showed that paper. I suppose, if you've been brooding over this matter, it will be a relief, a help to know that your fears were right. When your husband wrote that paper he was not in his right mind. The signs are simply unmistakable; they couldn't be counterfeited; there's insanity in every line, in every word of that handwriting. It would be interesting to know whether his hand was the same when he wrote of other things. But that's irrelevant. What's certain is that on one point he had a delusion, and that this delusion had begun to show itself in the form of a dream. Isn't it enough, now, if I assure you that his dream had no more real significance, no more rightful implication, than any other form of mania?"

She shook her head. "No. Why should it persist?"

"Ha-a-a!" he breathed in desperation. "Why should any mania persist in a disordered mind?"

"It isn't the same thing at all."

"But it is exactly and perfectly the same thing! It was the presence in his sleep of a maniacal delusion that was gradually overshadowing his waking consciousness, and that must have ended in his open insanity if death had not come to his relief."

She simply asked, "What was it?"

"What was it?" he echoed. "Well, you have a sort of right to know; perhaps you had better know. But I wish—I wish you had the strength to forego it—to accept my assurance, the most solemn, the most sincere I could give any one on a matter of life and death, that although his dream involved you, it no more rightfully inculpated you than it inculpated me, and that it ought to have no more consideration, no more influence, in your life than the ravings of any lunatic that came to you from an asylum window as you passed in the street. Now, won't that do? Can't you accept my assurance, and go home satisfied?"

"When I know what his dream was," she answered. "I can never rest again, now, till I know it."

"But there is this to be considered, Mrs. Faulkner," he urged. "There is the regard you have for him, his memory. He was no more responsible for dreaming his dream than you are for having been the subject of it. But you know how involuntary, how helpless, we often are in our judgments of others; and I warn you—it's my duty to warn you—that the danger is not that you may not be able to forgive yourself, but that you may not be able to forgive *him.*"

"I must take the risk of that. I must know everything, now, at any cost. I am not afraid of being unjust to him. I saw him suffer, and I can make every allowance." Wingate was silent, with his head down, and she began with a kind of gasp, "Did he—was he afraid of me? I know how suspicious people are who are affected as you say he was beginning to be—though I can't believe it, I can't imagine it!—and I can understand, if he *was*! Did he think I would hurt him, somehow? Was that what he dreamed? Did he dream that I was going to do him some harm—kill him——?"

"Oh, no! no! no!" cried Wingate, getting to his feet. "Nothing of that kind, I assure you!" He

spoke with the relief, as I fancied, of having found out the worst she had feared, and of being able to console her with something indefinitely less terrible. I had often known my wife push out a skirmish line of apprehension far beyond the main body of her anxiety, so as to have the comfort of finding herself within the utmost she had imagined of evil; and I understood the feminine principle on which Wingate counted, and shared his relief.

"Then what was it?" Hermia asked.

"What was it? Nothing. Nothing at all, in a manner! Nothing of the kind you feared. But if you must know,"—Wingate glanced at us where we sat spellbound by our sympathy and interest,—"though it's ridiculously unimportant in comparison with what you've suggested, I think perhaps you'd better hear it alone, Mrs. Faulkner."

"By all manner of means!" I said; and my wife said, "Yes, indeed!" as we rose together.

I felt from the first an odious quality in the part we had been obliged to bear; and I confess that I was beginning to bear it with some measure of resentment, in spite of my curiosity, and with some misgiving as to the delicacy of the woman who had

required our presence at this interview. But perhaps I judged her too severely. In some of the most intimate affairs and sentiments, in which women are conventionally supposed to play a veiled and hidden part, they really have an overt, almost a public rôle, which nature no doubt fits them to sustain, without violence to their modesty, without touching susceptibilities that in men would be intolerably wounded.

I was impatient of the mechanical effort Hermia made to detain my wife, to whose hand she clung, and whom I had to draw from her with me out of the room. My wife agreed with me that we must have gone, but I doubt if she perfectly thought so; and they both had an effect of yielding out of regard to the sensibilities of us men.

VIII.

I WAS in no humour to tempt any confidence from Wingate when I hurried out to the street door to see him off after I heard him come out of the library. My curiosity, such as I had, was damped by a sense of the indecency of knowing in brutal vocables what I already conjectured, and I was still resentful of having been obliged to enter into the affair to the extent I had.

Wingate let me help him on with his overcoat, and he put his hand on the door-knob before he spoke: "The next time you have a case of this kind, old fellow, I hope I shall be in Europe." He looked hot and dry, and he breathed harder than even a stout man need after being helped on with his overcoat. "I made a mistake in sending your wife and you out of the room. It was no easier for me, and Mrs. Faulkner says she shall tell her at once, anyway, and you might as well have had it at first-hand.

She takes it worse than I expected. Good night!" he added abruptly, after a pause, and an evident intention to say something else; and he flung himself down my steps and seemed to rebound into his coupé, which was standing before them.

I waited the next turn of events with an increasing sense of injury at the hands of our guest, for I knew that ultimately I must be drawn upon for the nervous force which my wife would spend in sympathising with her; and I had not yet recognised the claim that she seemed to think our purely accidental relations had established for her upon us.

But the next turn of events was apparently to wait our motion. I mechanically expected Hermia to come out of the library where I was mechanically impatient to take my book and pity her at my ease; but she did not come out, and I had to go and sit down in the parlour, which was less commodious for my compassion, and unusual for my book. I sat there, disconsolately trying to read, for what I thought a long time, till my wife came downstairs.

"Where is Mrs. Faulkner?" she asked, under her breath. I nodded toward the library. "But I thought the doctor had gone?"

"So he has. He went some time ago; but he didn't take her with him."

"I've been expecting her to ask for me," said my wife vaguely. "I hated to go to her. It would have seemed like prying."

"To a lady who was willing to have the whole matter, whatever it was, talked out before us both?

"That is true," said my wife. "Would you knock?"

"Perhaps I would listen at the key-hole first," said I, and I felt myself growing more and more sardonic, for no reason, except that I had such a good chance.

My wife meekly went and listened, and then, after a look at me, opened the library door and went in. It was nearly an hour before she rejoined me in our own room, having first gone with our guest to hers, and stayed with her there a little while.

Then she said, "Well, Basil, I never knew anything so sad in my life. I don't know what we are going to do. She must go home at once, and I don't see how she is ever to get there. That is what we have got to talk over now."

"I supposed you had talked it over already," I

suggested, still perversely affecting that cheap cynicism.

My wife took it for what it was, and ignored it.

"Poor stricken creature!" she sighed. "I don't believe she had moved after the doctor left her till I came in, and then she hardly moved. She had that awful stony quiet that people—strong people—have, when you bring them bad news. I could hardly get her to speak. She said she wanted me to know everything, but she did not know how to tell me, unless I asked her; and so little by little, we got it out together. But I think I'd better not tell you, dear, just in so many words, till she's out of the house; do you?"

"No; I guess I know pretty well what you have to tell," I answered, honestly enough, and without any ironical slant, even in my tone.

My wife went on. "I'm afraid Dr. Wingate didn't manage very well: he had something finer than nerves to deal with. But I don't blame *him*, poor man, either. He was thrown off his guard by her asking if her husband had dreamed that she was going to hurt him, and he thought that what he really did dream was so much less dreadful that it

would relieve her; and I'm afraid he went at it too lightly. But it seems that she had never imagined that he could have dreamed *that*, and it perfectly crushed her. Basil! Don't you believe there are some natures so innocent that they have no suspicion of suspicion, that they can't conceive of it? Well, that is Hermia Faulkner! She is on such a grand scale, she's so noble and faithful and loyal, that she can't even understand the kind of nature that could attribute wrong to her: its baseness, its cruelty. She's crushed under the ruin of her own ideal of that wretched man!"

"Oh, oh, oh!" I cried. "Isn't that rather a high horse you're on? I don't think poor old Faulkner was to blame for his crazy dream. I wouldn't like to shoulder the responsibility for my dreams!"

"*You* are very different. *You* are *good*," said my wife, "and you couldn't have such a dream, if you tried; but if you go, now, and think it was worse than it really was, I shall hate you. I should like to tell you *just* what it was: but you are such a fool, dear," she added tenderly, "that you'd be conscious the whole way, and couldn't help showing it every minute."

"The whole way? Every minute? What do you mean?"

"I've decided that you must take Hermia home."

"Oh, I see! That was why you were so willing we should inquire how she could get there. But supposing I can't leave my business?"

"But I know you can. You were going to New York with me, next week, and we can give that up. There's nothing else for it. We must! It will give you a chance to see your old friends out there, and you've simply got to do it; that's all." She added in terms expressive of the only phase of her anxiety that could be put concretely, and by no means representative of her entire motive. "I can't have her getting sick here on my hands; and there's no other way. Her mother-in-law is too old to come for her, and——"

"We might telegraph the Reverend James Nevil to come," I suggested.

"Basil!" cried my wife.

"Oh, it's no use, my dear! I'd better know just what I'm to be conscious of."

"You know it already; we've both known it from

the beginning; but I can't tell you. It isn't her fault, though it covers her with such cruel shame that she can't look herself in the face. It 's *his* fault for having him there to dream about; and it 's HIS fault for being there to be dreamt about." I knew that my wife meant Faulkner by her less, and Nevil by her greater, vehemence of accent. "I suppose she felt, all the time—such a woman would—that he had no right to bring his friendship into their married life that way. She must have felt hampered and molested by it; but she yielded to him because she didn't want to seem petty or jealous. There 's where I blame *her*. Basil! A woman's jealousy is God-given! It 's inspired, for her safety and for her husband's. She *ought* to show it."

"How about a man's?"

"Oh, that 's different! Men *have* no inspirations. Jealousy 's a low brutal instinct with them. Just see the difference between her feeling that his friend had no business in their family, and his making that very friend the object of his suspicions!"

"If you conjecture one fact," I said, "and hold Faulkner responsible for the other, the difference is certainly very much against him. But, as I under-

stand from Dr. Wingate, Faulkner's dream foreshadowed his alienation."

"Oh, don't talk to me of Dr. Wingate!" she cried. "He doesn't know anything about it. No! It was his miserable jealousy that turned his brain; it wasn't his insanity that caused his jealousy; and if you keep saying that, Basil, I shall think you are trying to justify him."

"Bless my soul! What question of justification is there?"

"If he was not responsible for his dream," she went on, "he was certainly responsible for the occasion of his dream, and so it comes to the same thing at last. It was his folly, his silly, romantic clinging to a sentiment that he ought to have flung away the instant he was married, which did all the harm. A husband shouldn't have any friend but his wife."

"You will never get me to deny that, my dear, at least as long as you 're in this dangerous humour."

"I know I 'm ridiculous," she said nervously. "But I do feel so sorry for that poor creature! She seems to me like some innocent thing caught in a trap; and she can't escape, and no one can set her free. I shall begin to believe that there is such a

thing as Fate, in that old Greek sense: something that punishes you for your sorrows and for the errors of others."

"There is certainly something that does that," I said, "whether we call it Fate or not. We suffer every day for our sorrows, and for the sins of men we never saw or even heard of. There 's solidarity in *that* direction, anyway."

"Yes, and why can't we feel it in the other direction? Why can't we feel that we 're helped, as well as hurt by those unknown people? Why aren't we rewarded for our happiness?"

"It 's all a mystery; and I don't know but we *are* rewarded for our happiness, quite as much as we 're punished for our misery. Some utterly forgotten ancestral dyspeptic rises from the dust now and then, and smites me with his prehistoric indigestion. Well, perhaps it 's some other forgotten ancestor, whose motions were all hale and joyous, that makes me get up now and then impersonally gay and happy, and go through the day as if I had just come into a blessed immortality."

"Ah, those awful dead! Basil," she entreated, "from this time on, let 's live so that whichever dies

first, the other won't have anything to be remorseful for!"

"We can't do that, and I don't believe we were meant to do it. We have to live together as if we were going to live together for ever."

"Why, we *are*, dearest! Don't you think we are?"

"I can't imagine anything else; but I don't understand that this is the prospect that now looks so disheartening for Mrs. Faulkner. If it were a question of her going on for ever with Faulkner, it would be very simple, or comparatively simple. In that case the wrong he had helplessly done her in his crazy dream would only endear him to her the more, for it would be something for her perpetually to exercise her love of forgiving upon. But the difficulty is that she now wishes to go on living for ever with somebody else. I don't blame her for that; on the contrary I think it's altogether well and wholly right, something to be desired and praised. But if the one she now wishes to go on living with for ever happens to be the very person whom her dead husband's dream foreboded——"

"Basil!"

"Why, you see, it complicates the affair." We had touched the quick, and we were silent a moment, quivering with sympathy. "It's all a mystery, and one part no more a mystery than another; but I suppose that when we come really to know, it will all be so very, very simple that we shall be astonished. Mrs. Faulkner's trouble isn't about the future, though; that has to be left to take care of itself; her trouble is about the present and about the past. I haven't the least idea that she ever gave a thought to Nevil as long as her husband lived, or for long after he died."

"O Basil! I *like* to hear you say that!"

"I dare say you'd like to say it yourself: it's very magnanimous. But I can understand how such a woman would now begin to question whether she had not thought of him, and would end by bringing herself in guilty, no matter what the facts were. I didn't like her attempting to ignore the tenor of Faulkner's dream when she went to talk with Wingate about it immediately after his death. That was romantic."

"I didn't like that either," said my wife. "Yes, it was romantic."

"If she had made Wingate tell her then, it would have been all over with by this time. Either she would have resented it, and set about forgetting Faulkner, and living a denial of all fealty to the memory of a man who could wrong her so——"

"Basil! You said he was not responsible for it!"

"Or else she would have succumbed to it, and refused ever to see Nevil, and this frightful quandary that she's got us all into never would have been brought about."

My wife could not laugh with me at our personal entanglement in Mrs. Faulkner's affair, which my words reminded her of. She began to enlarge upon the hardship of it; and she was not reconciled to it by my arguments going to show how nothing any one did or suffered could be done or suffered to one's-self alone, and that probably at that very moment some nameless savage in Central Africa was shaping our destiny in some degree and was making favour with his fetich for our disaster, when he supposed himself to be merely invoking protection against a raid of Arab slavers. Those were the days of frequent railway accidents, and she recurred to her fixed principle that I must never go a railroad

journey alone, because it was necessary that when I was killed on the train she and the children must be there to be killed with me. Nothing less than the infatuation she had for Mrs. Faulkner would have supported her in the sacrifice of such a principle, and I am not sure that even that would have been enough without the lively fear of having Mrs. Faulkner break down with a nervous fever, or something, before we could get her out of the house. I recurred to this consideration, which Isabel had already touched upon, and treated it in a philosophic spirit, as an instance of the grotesque and squalid element which is so apt to mar a heroic situation, in order apparently to keep human nature modest; but she could not follow me. She said, yes, that decided it; and she drew a sigh of relief, which she cut short to express her wonder that Dr. Wingate should have told Hermia what Faulkner's dream was when he knew it would perfectly kill her. She said she had long had her doubts of his wisdom, and she now proceeded to disable it, with that confidence in her ability to judge him which all women feel in regard to physicians. At least, she said, if he had any sort of intuition, or even the

smallest grain of common-sense, or the slightest delicacy, he would not have told her that the man whom the dream involved was the very man she was going to marry. I said that perhaps Wingate did not know she was going to marry Nevil; and she acknowledged that this was true, and began to rehabilitate him. I was in hopes that she would not ask me why I had not told him; for I now saw, or thought I saw, that I had been mistaken in the delicacy which had kept me from doing it. But I was not to escape: the question came, in due course, and all my struggles to free myself only served to fix the blame for the whole trouble more firmly upon me. She said that now she saw it all; and that I need not go to Central Africa for the cause of our predicament.

I spent a troubled night, tormented, whether sleeping or waking, by a fantastic exaggeration of the whole business, and exasperated by a keen sense of its preposterousness. It seemed to me intolerable that I should be made the victim of it: that this gossamer nothing, which might perhaps accountably involve the lives of those concerned through a morbid conscience, should have power upon me, to

drag me a thousand miles away from my family, and subject me to all the chances of danger and death which I must incur, seemed to me atrocious. I spent myself in long imaginary dialogues with my wife, with Hermia, with Nevil, in which I convinced them to no effect that I had nothing whatever to do with the matter, and would not have. Faulkner appeared to me a demoniac presence, at the end of the lurid perspective, running back to that scene in the garden—implacable, immovable, ridiculous like all the rest, monstrous, illogical, and no more to be reasoned away than to be entreated.

I woke in the morning with the clear sense that there was only one thing for it, and that was simply to refuse to go with Mrs. Faulkner. I spent the forenoon in arranging my business for a week's absence, and I started West with her on the three o'clock train.

PART THIRD.—NEVIL.

I.

In spite of my wife's care that I should not be made conscious in Mrs. Faulkner's presence by knowing just the terms of her husband's dream, I must have been rather embarrassed in setting off upon her homeward journey with her if she had seemed aware of any strangeness in it. But she seemed aware of nothing. I could not help seeing that my company, or the supervision of some one, was essential to her. She was like a person mentally benumbed; all the currents of her thought were turned so deeply inward, toward the one trouble which engrossed them, that she appeared incapable of motion from herself. She did what I bade her with a mute passivity, as if she were my mesmeric subject, and with a sort of unseeing stare, like a sleep-walker's. My wife came with us to the station to take leave of her, but Hermia had parted

with her at the moment of being left alone with Dr. Wingate the night before, and I think could not have been fully sensible of any of us since. I had a fantastic notion of being like something in a dream to her, and I am afraid I must have been like something very harassing, with the attentions I was obliged to offer her.

I tried to make them as few as possible, and to confine them to the elemental questions of eating and sleeping. These were very simply settled; she neither ate nor slept throughout the journey. I spent all the time I could in the smoking car; when I came to her with the announcement that at this or that next station we were to have five, or ten, or twenty minutes for refreshment, after the barbarous custom of the days before dining-cars, she said she wanted nothing, so definitively that I could not urge her; and in the morning, after my nightmares in my berth, I found her sitting in one corner of the section I had secured for her, with every appearance of not having moved from her place since she first took it on coming aboard the car. Her cheek was propped on the palm of one hand, and she had that blind, straightforward stare.

It was a strange journey; and if our fellow-passengers made their conjectures about us, it must have been to the effect that I was in charge of a mild case of melancholia, and was rather negligent of my charge. I left her as much to herself as I could, for I understood with what a painful strain she would have to detach herself from the trouble on which her thoughts were bent, if I interrupted them, and that I could in no manner relieve her, or help her to puzzle it out. Toward the end of the second afternoon we came to one of the last stations between us and our destination, and then she started up with a long sigh, and after a moment began to put together the little bags and wraps which women travel with.

"Here we are at Blue Clay," I said, coming up to her.

"Yes," she answered, "this is the last stop the express makes before we get home."

Probably she had taken note of every point and incident in the journey with that superficial consciousness which is so active in times of trouble. She now showed an alertness like that of one awakened from a refreshing sleep, and I had an in-

creasing sense of her having cast off the burden that had oppressed her. There was nothing of levity in her apparent relief; her exaltation was noble and dignified as her dejection had been. Perhaps she had not reached any solution of her trouble; perhaps she had simply cast it from her by a natural reaction as we do when we have suffered enough, for one time, and was destined to take it up again. But I felt that I could not be mistaken in the fact of her relief. If I was mistaken, then it was because she had a strength to conceal her suffering which I could not imagine because she had so frankly shown her suffering before. Her present behaviour might have been a woman's ideal of the way she would wish to behave in the circumstances; but I still think Hermia Faulkner had found freedom, at that moment, from the stress of her preoccupation, and began to assume a certain hospitality of manner toward me, because she was able without pain to do so. She thanked me with ingenuous sweetness for coming home with her, and expressed a sense of the sacrifice which would have satisfied even the exacting woman who had made me make it. She asked if I had slept well, as if I had just got up; and she

hoped I would not suffer by the great kindness which Mrs. March and I had both shown her, and which she would never forget. I protested, of course, that it was all nothing, and said that I had long wished to revisit the scenes of my youth, and had eagerly seized the excuse that the hope of being useful to her gave me for coming now. She answered, "Yes; that is what Mrs. March told me." As we drew near our destination she sympathised with the interest I felt in approaching the place where I had spent the happiest years of my young manhood, and helped me to make out some of the landmarks by which I hoped to identify the city I remembered. But the new city was built all out over and beyond them, and our approach was hurried by finding them within it, so that before I realised it the train was slowing up in the grandiose depôt of vaulted brick and glass which replaced the shabby wooden shed of former days. I had intended to renew there the emotions with which I parted from a friend long since dead, the night I started for Europe; but I was distracted by the change, as well as by the hurly-burly of arrival, and I willingly abandoned myself to the friendly care of the black

serving-man of Mrs. Faulkner who was there to meet us, and who at once breveted me one of the family. He took my bag, and led the way out to Mrs. Faulkner's carriage, and put it in with her things before I thought to stop him.

"Oh, I can't let you take the trouble of driving me to a hotel," I said. "I will get a hack here."

"Why, surely," she answered, in a tone of wounded expectation, you are coming to *us*?"

"No; I shall be here such a little while, and——"

"But that's all the more reason why you should be our guest. My mother would be hurt if you went anywhere else; we will leave you free to come and go as you like; only you *must stay* with us."

It was useless to protest, and I got into the carriage with her.

II.

BOTH then and afterward, when we reached the Faulkner mansion, I was aware of not having done the Faulkners justice as personages, in our meeting at Swampscott. I had understood, in a careless way, that their occupation of that villa and the style of their living in it meant money; but Faulkner himself was such an informal sloven, and Hermia was so little attributable in character to anything about her, and the doom hanging over them was so exclusive of all other interest in them, that I had not conjectured the degree of state from which they were detached. The quiet richness of the equipage that had met us now was the forerunner of a sumptuous comfort, far beyond any expectation of mine, in all Mrs. Faulkner's belongings and surroundings. She was not a person you could imagine caring for the evidences or uses of wealth; she affected you at once as exterior to all such sordid accidents; as

capable of being a goddess in any gown. As a matter of fact, however, the costliness in which her whole life was clad was certainly very great.

I had forgotten the spacious grounds in which Faulkner's house stood, or perhaps I now noticed them more because all the neighbourhood had been closely built up in the process of the city's growth. In the heart of the town the mansion rose from the midst of ample lawns and gardens, enclosed by a high brick wall, such as I had always said was my ideal of stately bounds; and it all looked much older than anything at the East, from the soft-coal smoke with which wall and mansion and garden trees were blackened. I suppose it was the smell of this in the air, and the mat of ivy on the house front, that confused my memories of the farther past with more recent recollections of England, and imparted to my present sensations the vagueness of both, as we rolled up under the *porte cochère*. I saw that the house must have been vastly enlarged since I had been there last, and the bulk of the elms that overtopped it, and the height of the slim white birches on the lawn before it, warned me how long ago that had been. Within, I was met by the fresh, brisk

warmth of a fire of hickory limbs, that burnt on the wide hall hearth, and I at once delivered myself up to the caresses of the velvety ease in which all life moved there. These influences are so subtly corrupting that a vulgar question formed itself in my mind, as I followed the servant up the broad staircase to my room, and I wondered how much the invitation of such luxury might tempt a man fagged in heart and mind. I said to myself that if I were Nevil, for example, and I were in love with the heart of this material bliss, I should certainly let no fantastic scruple bar me from possession. I cannot exactly say how the formulation of this low thought affected me with a perception of Hermia's charm in a way it was not apt to make its appeal. But when I went down to dinner, and met her again, mellowed to harmony with all that softness and richness by a dress that lent itself in colour and texture to her peculiar beauty, I was abashed by her youth and loveliness. I had till then thought of her so much as a mysteriously stricken soul, that I had never done justice to her as a woman that some favoured man might be in love with, as men are with women, and might marry. When I now

realised this I was ashamed of realising it, and was afraid of betraying it somehow, by some levity, some want of conformity in mood or manner to what I knew of her. I suffered myself to wonder if Nevil ever had this unruly sense of her, against which something sadly reproachful in her beauty itself seemed to protest, and which I feel that I have given undue import and fixity in putting it into words. I suppose it was all from seeing her for the first time in colours, and from perceiving with a distinctness unfelt before that she was in the perfect splendor of a most regal womanhood. Something perversely comic mixed with my remorse, when I met her eye with these thoughts in my mind, and fancied a swift query there as to the impression I had of her. I wished to tease, to mystify her, to keep her between laughing and crying, as a naughty boy will with some little girl whom he pretends to have found something wrong about. I have since thought she may have been questioning whether I read in her costume any conclusion as to the matter pending in her mind; and that she meant to express by this assertion of her right to be beautiful the decision which she had reached. If this was so, she

had chosen a means too finely, too purely feminine; my wife might have understood her, but I certainly did not.

The dowager Mrs. Faulkner was there with her in the drawing-room, a plain old lady, whom I could see her son had looked like, in a rich old lady's silk. She welcomed me with a motherly cordiality, and put me on that footing of intimacy with Faulkner in the past which I was always wishing in vain to refuse. I perceived that I had for her only the personality that he had given me; she could not detach me from the period of my first acquaintance with him. She began at once to talk literature with me, as if that were the practical interest of my life; and I found her far better read, and of a far more modern taste, than her son had been. She was one of those old ladies who perhaps reach their perfection a little away from the centres of thought, or rather of talk, and in some such subordinate city as that where her life had been passed. She had kept the keen relish for books which seems to dull where books are written and printed, and she had vivid opinions about them which were not faded by constant wear. I found also that she knew personally a

great many of the authors we discussed: it was still in the palmy days of lecturing, and the Faulkners had made their house the hospitable sojourn of every writer who had come to the place to read his essay or poem. She told me that I had the authors' seat at her table, and that the very chair I then sat in had been occupied by Emerson, Curtis, Wendell Phillips, Saxe, Dr. Holland, Bayard Taylor, Mark Twain, and I do not know who else.

I confess that she fatigued me a little with all that enthusiasm, but except for her passion for authorship in books and out of them, I found that I must revise my impression that she was a romantic person. Her relations with her daughter-in-law had nothing, certainly, of romantic insubstantiality; they were of the solidest and simplest affection, founded apparently upon a confidence as perfect as could have existed between them if Hermia had been her own child. She gave her the head of the table, and she let herself be ruled by her in many little things in which old ladies are apt to be rebellious to younger women. She seemed to wish only to lead the talk, but she deferred to Hermia in several questions of fact as well as taste, and though she always spoke to

her as "child," it was evidently with no wish to depose or minify her. On her part Hermia, without seeming to do so, showed herself watchful of Mrs. Faulkner's comfort and pleasure at every moment, and evidently returned her liking in all its cordiality. There was no manner of jealousy between them, perhaps because Mrs. Faulkner could never have been a beauty, and could not even be retrospectively envious of Hermia's magnificence, and partly also because they were temperaments that in being wholly opposite did not in the least wear upon each other.

This at least was my rapid formulation of the case. The dinner was exquisite, and Mrs. Faulkner praised it with impartial jollity, assuring me that I should have had no such dinner if she had been in authority, but that Hermia's genius for house-keeping was such that its inspiration ruled even in her absence. As for herself, she did not know what she was eating.

"Nor, I hope, how much I am," I said.

In fact I felt quite torpid after dinner. As we sat before the fire I began to have long dreams between the syllables of the words I heard spoken, and I had a passage of conversation with my wife and

Faulkner, in which it was all pleasantly arranged in regard to Nevil, while I was dimly aware of Mrs. Faulkner's asking me whether I thought George Eliot would live as a poet.

I do not know whether I perceptibly disgraced myself or not. But we made a short evening, and a little after nine o'clock I acquiesced, with an alacrity for which I am sure my wife would never have forgiven me, in Hermia's suggestion that I must be very tired, and would like to go to bed.

III.

It was certainly a most anomalous situation, and I woke with the brilliant idea that for my own part in it the whole thing was to take it as naturally as possible; which was probably reflected into my waking thought from some otherwise wholly vanished dream.

I found it early, as to the daylight, but in that smoke-dimmed November air it might very well be still rather dark at seven o'clock. I went out for a breath of the pensive confusion which I found still persisted in it, and inhaled my glad youth and my first joy of travel in the odour of those bituminous fumes. The grass was still brightly green on the lawn;

"And parting summer lingering blooms delayed"

in the garden which stretched with box-bordered walks and grape-vined trellises to the wall at one side of the house. The leaves had dropped from

the trees, and I picked up from the fallen foliage, soft and dank under my feet, a black walnut, pungently aromatic, and redolent of my boyhood. At the same time a faint scent rose from the box, and transported me to that old neglected garden by the sea where I saw Faulkner die. A thrill of immense pity for him pierced my heart. I thought with what a passion of tenderness for that woman he must have planned this house, from which he was now in eternal exile, and her willingness to forget him in her love for another seemed monstrous. It was hard to be a philosophical spectator; I found myself taking the unfriended side of the dead.

In the house, when I returned to it, I was met by Faulkner's mother, before that cheerful hall fire. She put aside the damp morning paper which she had just opened to dry in the heat, and gave me her old, soft hand.

"Do you find many familiar points about the place?" she asked.

"No; I 'm afraid I hadn't kept any distinct remembrance of it. At least, it 's all very strange."

"You would recognise my son's room, I suppose," she said, turning and leading the way down a cor-

ridor that branched away from the hall. "The old house is all here; the new one was built round it; and we 've kept poor Douglas's den, as he used to call it, just as it was."

I thought it an odd fancy she should wish me to visit the place with her, but I concluded that perhaps she wished to tell her daughter I had already seen it, if she should ask. At any rate, I had no comment to make even in my own mind: we all deal as we best can with our bereavements, and it is but lamely, helplessly at the best.

We had to pass through the library, and I recognised some of the rare editions and large paper copies with which poor Faulkner had so quickly surfeited me; and there were two or three of his ridiculous Madonnas hung about, cold engravings with wide mats in frigid frames of black, after a belated taste for the quiet in art. They made me shiver, and in the room which we entered from the library that night, and found Nevil smoking there, we were now met by a ghostly scent of tobacco, as if from the cigars that Faulkner kept on nervously consuming one after another, as we had talked. It brought back my youth, which seemed haunting

the city everywhere; not my youth bright and warm as we find it imagined in the lying books, but cold and dead, the spectre that really revisits after-years, and makes us glad it is dead.

The stout-hearted old lady pushed back a blind that had swung to across an open casement, and let in the morning sun. "We keep it aired every day; I can't bear to let it seem to be getting out of use. Hermia feels as I do about it, and she would have asked you to come here and smoke and write your letters; but I thought perhaps I had better bring you first. She was very tired, and we sat up late, talking. Will you sit down? Breakfast will not be ready till half-past eight."

I obeyed, and she sat down too. I wondered what could be her motive in wishing to keep me there, and what her theory was in bringing up the last matter that I should have supposed she would like to talk of in that place. Perhaps she spoke from that absence of sensation in regard to certain interests of life which we imagine callousness in the old: those interests are simply extinct in them, and they are no harder than the young who still feel them so keenly. Perhaps she still felt them, and

meant to make a supreme renunciation of the past on the spot hallowed to her by the strongest associations. I do not know; I only know that she began to speak, and to speak with a plainness that I have no right to call obtuseness.

IV.

"Mr. March, Hermia has been telling me of what she learnt in Boston from Dr. Wingate."

"Yes?" I said feebly.

"It was my wish that she should go there, and see him, and find out to the last word all that he remembered of Douglas. She would not have gone without my wish; but it was her wish, too; or rather it was the necessity of both of us. After we found that paper of Douglas's, which she took with her, we could neither of us rest till we knew everything."

I nodded, for want of wit to say anything relevant, and she went on.

"I wish to say at once that I thoroughly approve of Hermia's engagement to Mr. Nevil, and that nothing she heard from Dr. Wingate has changed me in the least about it. At first, the engagement was rather a shock to me; but not more so than his offer was to Hermia; perhaps not so much."

There was no faltering in Mrs. Faulkner's voice, but a tear ran down her cheek. "We are very strangely made, Mr. March. It is twenty years since my husband died, and I have never once thought of marrying again; but I cannot honestly say that I would not have married if I had met any one I loved. I know that such a thing was possible, though I did not know it then. At first, after we have lost some one who is very dear to us, it seems as if henceforward we must live only for the dead: to atone to them for the default of our lives with them, and to make reparation for unkindness. That is the way I felt when my husband died. I wanted to keep myself in communion with him. But that was not possible. Nature soon teaches us better than that; she shows us that as long as we live upon the earth we cannot live at all for the dead: we can live only for the living."

"Yes," I said. "I never thought of it before, though."

"Have you ever known any deep bereavement?"

"No; I have been very fortunate."

"If you ever have such a sorrow, you will understand what I say as you never can without it. I

had learned the truth when my son died, and I tried to make my daughter accept it from me. But she could not; she could only accept it from experience. He had been her whole life so long that she did not wish to live any other. No woman ever devoted herself more utterly than she did to him. She could not realise that as long as she remained in the world she could not devote herself to him any more; that all that had come absolutely to an end. The truth was the harder for her to learn 'by reason of great strength.' She thought that for his sake she could bear not to know what was the trouble of mind in which he died. That was a mistake."

"My wife and I thought so, when we heard of it. Dr. Wingate told me about it. But it was very heroic."

"It was heroic, yes; but it was impossible. I knew it at the time. If she had made Dr. Wingate tell her then, she could have thought it out and lived it down; or, if she couldn't have done that, then at least what makes it so cruel now would never have happened."

"Yes, I see," I said, in the pause which Mrs. Faulkner made.

"I have always been willing," she resumed, "and sometimes I have been anxious, that Hermia should marry again. Marriage is for this world. We are told that by Christ himself, and we know it instinctively. Death does dissolve it inexorably; and although I believe, as Swedenborg says in one of his strange books, that one man and one woman shall live together to all eternity in a union that will make them one personality, still I believe that, as he says, that union may or may not begin on earth, and that it will be formed hereafter without regard to earthly ties. I was not a fool, and I saw that Hermia was young and attractive, and I expected her to have the feelings of other young and attractive women."

There was a mixture of mysticism and matter-of-fact in this dear old lady's formulation of the case which was bringing me near the verge of a smile, but I said gravely, "Of course."

"But she never showed the least sign of it; and when, after Mr. Nevil came back from Europe, their engagement took place, I was entirely unprepared for such a thing. He had been with us a great deal. We nursed him through a long sickness after that

broken engagement of his in Nebraska, and he was quite like one of ourselves. In fact, his friendship with Douglas dates back so far—to the very beginning of their college days—that I can hardly remember when James did not seem like a son to me. You mustn't suppose, though, that I ever objected to the engagement, or do now. I highly approve of it. But I had always fancied that the very intimacy that Hermia was thrown into with him was unfavourable to her forming any fancy for him. In fact, she has always been rather critical of him; and I know that she rather dislikes clergymen—as men, I mean. She is a religious person in her own way; I've nothing to say against her way. So, as I say, I was sufficiently astonished; but that is neither here nor there. I gave my cordial consent at once. James has not had a very joyous life; he has made it rather hard for himself, and I suppose that the idea of putting some brightness into it may have first made Hermia—— But at any rate they were very happy together; and though Hermia had her morbid feelings occasionally about Douglas, and seemed to think it was wicked to turn from him to anybody else, and a kind of treason, still, she always listened to me about it, and would be reason-

able when I showed her how foolish she was. I wanted her to put his things away, and there I suppose I made a little mistake, especially the things connected with his last days—writings and letters, and odd scraps, that she was always intending to look over, and never quite had the strength for. She consented to burn them; but she could not bring herself to do that without reading them; and so we found that paper which she carried to Dr. Wingate. Do you know what was in it?"

"No, certainly. She showed it to him in our presence, and I think she was willing we should know, but he decided very wisely that he would rather speak with her alone about it."

My feeling did not seem to make much impression upon Mrs. Faulkner. "I suppose you do know, Mr. March, that my son was not quite in his right mind when he died?"

I admitted that I had some misgivings to that effect.

"I don't understand," she went on, "why we should be so ashamed to acknowledge that any one connected with us is not perfectly sane. As if the world were not full of crazy people! As if we were not all a little crazy on some point or other! The

pain he suffered had affected his mind; it's very common, I believe; and he had a delusion that showed itself in the form of a dream, but that would have been sure, if he lived, to have broken out in a mania."

She stopped, as if she expected me to prompt her or agree with her, and I said, "Yes, Dr. Wingate told me something of the kind."

"But he gave you no hint of what the dream—the delusion—was?"

"None."

"We used often to try to think what it could be. It seemed to give him a dislike or distrust for Hermia; and we thought—we hardly ever spoke of it openly; now we must handle it without shrinking, no matter what pain it gives! We thought—that it involved some fear of violence from her. People whose minds are beginning to be affected often have such dreadful fancies about those who are dearest to them."

"Yes, yes, I know," I said, and I hope I did not let my tone express the slight impatience I felt at being obliged to traverse ground I had been over with Hermia already in this quest.

"But it was nothing of that kind whatever. It was"—Mrs. Faulkner hesitated, as if to prepare me for a great surprise—"jealousy."

"Jealousy?" I repeated, and I could not help throwing into the word a touch of the surprise which she evidently expected of me. I had not followed her so far without perceiving that an old lady so devoted to literature valued the literary quality of the situation; that with all her good sense and true and just feeling she had the foible of being rather proud of a passage in her family life which was so like a passage of romance.

"Yes," she went on. "And of all things, jealousy of her with—with James." I could say nothing to a fact which I had conjectured long before, and she continued: "Dr. Wingate seemed to think that now she had better know exactly what the dream was, since the paper we had found distressed her so much, and take it in the right way. It was a scribble in one of his note-books, on a leaf that he had torn out and probably meant to tear up. It had the date, and it spoke of his having that dream again; that he had begun to have it every night, and if he fell asleep by day. The leaf was torn out at the side

in places, and you could only read scraps of sentences, but it all accused her of wishing his death. It would have driven any other woman wild, but Hermia had been through too much already. She told me something of it, to explain the paper as well as she could; and she said that she knew you and Mrs. March had noticed something strange in Douglas's manner toward her the day you were there; and I urged her to go right on and consult you both, and see Dr. Wingate, and find out exactly what the trouble was."

I was silent, for want of anything fitting to say, though she seemed to expect me to speak.

"The doctor told her that Douglas had been having the dream almost a year before he died: at first every month or two, and then every week. So far as he could remember, it was always exactly the same thing from the very beginning. He dreamed that she and James were—attached, and were waiting for him to die, so that they could get married. Then he would see them getting married in church, and at the same time it would be his own funeral, and he would try to scream out that he was not dead; but Hermia would smile, and say to the people

that she had known James before she knew Douglas; and then *both* ceremonies would go on, and he would wake. That was all."

"It seems to me quite enough. Horrible! Horrible! I'm surprised that Wingate should have told her."

"He had to do so. There was nothing else. She got it from him by questioning; though I suppose he thought it best she should know just what the trouble was, so that she could see how perfectly fantastic it was, and be able to deal with it accordingly."

"Poor man! How he must have suffered from that unrelenting nightmare! And it seems too ghastly to drag from his grave the secret he kept while he lived." These thoughts were so vivid in my mind that I should not have been surprised if Mrs. Faulkner had replied to them like spoken words.

But she only said: "There were some strange details of the dream, which it seems Dr. Wingate recalled; he may have written it down after hearing Douglas tell it; and from the description of the church which he gave, Hermia recognised it as one

here in the city: James's own church. Of course," said the old lady, ignoring the shudder with which I received this final touch, "Dr. Wingate might not have been so explicit if he had known of Hermia's engagement to James. I suppose you hadn't told him?"

"No," I said, and I set that omission down as the chief enormity in a life which has not been free from some blunders worse than crimes.

"Well, that is the whole affair, and we must act at once," said Mrs. Faulkner.

"Break off the engagement, of course," was at my tongue's end; but I found out I had said nothing when she added—

"James must know it all without delay. He has been out of town, but he will be home to-night, and he must know it before he meets Hermia again."

"Of course," I said.

"We talked it over late into the night, and we both came to that conclusion. In fact, Hermia had thought it out on the way home: and she said that just as the train came in sight of home yesterday, it all flashed upon her what she must do. She must leave the future wholly to James, to do whatever he

thought right after he knew everything. She says it came to her like a sudden relief from pain. You must have thought it strange we could keep up, as we did in the evening, but it was the revulsion of feeling with her, and I knew nothing till you left us. She merely said, when we met, 'It is all right, mother,' and I should have thought so, if she had told me every word. The decision she reached is the only one. We must leave it to James. She rests in that, and I can't say whether the thought of my poor son's illusion troubles her or not, in itself. I know that it ought not to trouble her; but at the same time I know that it is something which we ought not to keep from James. Men often look at things very differently from women, the best of women."

V.

It went through my mind that the affections being the main interest of women's lives, perhaps they dealt with them more practically if not more wholesomely than men. Certainly their treatment of them seems much more business-like.

Heaven knows what was really in that old woman's heart, as she talked so bravely of a future from which even her son's memory was to be obliterated. Whether it was a sacrifice of herself she was completing, or whether she was accomplishing an end which she freely intended, I shall never be certain; but I thought afterward that she had perhaps schooled herself to look only at Hermia's side of the affair, and had come to feel that she could do no wrong to the dead, whom she could no longer help, by seeking the happiness of the living, whom she could help so much. I myself have always reasoned to this effect, and in what I had to do with it I did my best to

bring others to the same mind; and yet at that moment, in that place, it seemed a hellish thing. I saw Faulkner with the inner vision by which alone, doubtless, we see the dead, standing there where I first met him, by that table where we were sitting, with his long nervous fingers, yellowed at their tips by his cigar, trembling on an open page; and then I saw him fall back on the seat of the arbour in the old seaside garden and die. What a long tragedy it was that had passed between those two meetings! Had not his suffering won him the right to remembrance? None of us would have denied this, but what was proposed was to forget him; to blot his memory and his sorrow, as he had himself been blotted, out of the world for ever. The living must do this for their lives' sake; the dead must not master us through an immortal grief. All the same I pitied Faulkner, pitied him even for his baleful dream, whose shadow had clouded his own life, and seemed destined to follow that of others as relentlessly; and I pitied him all the more because there seemed no one to do it but me, who had cared for him so little while he lived. He had suffered greatly, and by no fault of his own, unless you could blame

his folly in having his friend so familiarly a part of his home that his crazy jealousy must make him its object almost necessarily. But even this weakness, culpable as it was, was a weakness and not a wrong; and no casuistry could prove it malevolent. Something impersonally sinister was in it all, and the group involved was severally as blameless as the victims of fate in a Greek trilogy. Neither I nor any other witness of the fact considered for a moment that Faulkner had cause for the dark suspicion which was the beginning and the end of his dream.

I do not know whether Mrs. Faulkner had been saying anything else before I woke from these thoughts and heard her say, "I have spoken very fully and freely to you, Mr. March, both because you knew much of this matter already, and because I need—Hermia needs—your help. We depend upon your kindness; we are quite helpless without you, and you were one of my son's early friends, and can enter into our feelings."

"I assure you, Mrs. Faulkner," I began; and I was going to say that the matter of my early friendship with her son had somehow always been strangely exaggerated; but I found that I could not decently

do this, under the circumstances, and I said—"There is nothing in my power that I wouldn't gladly do for you."

"I was certain of that," she answered. "James must know of this—of the whole fact—as soon as he gets back. But Hermia can't write to him about it, and I can't speak to him." I began to feel a cold apprehension steal over me; at the same time a light of intelligence concerning Hermia's hospitable eagerness to make me her guest dawned upon me. Could that exquisite creature, in that electrical moment of relief from her trouble have foreseen my usefulness by the same flash that showed her the simple duty she had in the matter? I do not think I should have blamed her, if that were the case; and I was prepared for Mrs. Faulkner's conclusion: "We must ask *you* to speak to James."

I was prepared, but I was certainly dismayed, too; and I promptly protested: "My dear Mrs. Faulkner, I don't see how I could possibly do that. I am very sorry, very sorry indeed; but I cannot. I should not feel warranted in assuming such a confidential mission to Mr. Nevil, by my really slight acquaintance, or by anything in my past relations with your

son. I have been most reluctant to know anything about this painful business," and if this was not quite true, it was certainly true that I had not sought to know anything. "At every point my wife and I have respected the secrecy in which we felt it ought to remain, even against the impulse of sympathetic curiosity."

"Then Mrs. March did not tell you what it was when you started home with Hermia?"

"Surely not! She would have thought it a betrayal of Mrs. Faulkner that would have been embarrassing to me; and how could you suppose I would let you go on and tell me the whole story if I knew it already?"

"I didn't think of that," said Mrs. Faulkner. "Hermia and I both took it for granted that Mrs. March had told you." I did not say anything, and she added ruefully, "Then I don't know what we shall do. Is it asking too much to ask if you can suggest anything?"

I knew from her tone that she was hurt as well as disappointed by this refusal of mine to act for them; strange as it appears, she must have counted unquestioningly upon my consent. I said, to gain time

as much as possible, for I had no doubt on that point, "Excuse me, Mrs. Faulkner, do I understand this request to come from you both?"

"No; my daughter knows nothing about it. The idea of asking you was entirely my own; and I made a point of seeing you as soon as possible, this morning. If you must refuse, I beg you will not let her know."

"You may depend upon my silence, Mrs. Faulkner. But," and I rose and began to walk about the room, "why should you tell Mr. Nevil what the dream was; or at least that it concerned him? We must consider that, in the light of reason, the thing is non-existent. It has no manner of substance, or claim upon any one's conscience, or even interest. Dr. Wingate did not wish Mrs. Faulkner to know it; and I really think that when she insisted, he would have done wisely and righteously to lie to her about it. I'm sure he would have done so if he had known that she was engaged to Mr. Nevil. But it's too late, now; the mischief's done, as far as she's concerned. The question is now how to stop the evil from going farther; and I say there is no necessity for Mr. Nevil's knowing anything about it.

Treat it from this moment as the unreality which it is; ignore it."

I went on to the same effect; but as I talked I knew more and more that I was wasting my breath, and in a bad cause, and I saw that Mrs. Faulkner even ceased to follow me. One of the maids came to my rescue with the announcement that breakfast was served. We followed her, and I ate with the appetite to which I have noticed that the exercise of the sympathies always gives an edge of peculiar keenness.

VI.

HERMIA did not join us at breakfast, but I had no need to account for her absence upon that theory of extreme fatigue from her journey, which Mrs. Faulkner urged with so much superfluous apology. I began to have my reluctances about that old lady, to wish to escape from her, because I had refused to oblige her in that little matter of interviewing Nevil, and I was afraid she would recur to it. I made an excuse of wanting to look about the town, and I went out as soon as I could get away after breakfast.

Now that I was there, and had come so far, I was willing to see all I could of the place, and of several people in it whom I remembered as very charming; and I felt exasperated by the terms of my presence. I reviled myself for going to the Faulkners, though I knew I could not help it; but being their guest I could not leave them except to leave town. I strolled about harassed with the notion that I would

go on the night express, and denying myself in the interest of this early departure all those little lapses into sentiment concerning the past which I had always expected to indulge when I returned to its scenes. I found myself unwilling to meet my old friends, with the burden on me of having to say that I was there only for the day, and to explain that I had come on with Mrs. Faulkner, and was her guest. I hated the air of mystery the affair would have; but there was one person whom I could not really think of going away without seeing. As a young man I used to come and go in her house as freely as in my own home, at any time between nine in the morning and twelve at night; she had been kind to me, and helpful and inspiring, as only a brilliant woman of the world, who is also good, can be to an ambitious, shy, awkward young fellow of twenty-two; and I decided to make hers stand for all the friendships of the past.

She made me so sweetly welcome that in a moment we had broken through the little web of alienation that the spider years had been spinning between us; and found ourselves exactly in the old relations again. I had been a little curious, after seeing so

much of the world, to see whether she would appear as clever and accomplished as she used to seem; and I was glad to find she bore the test of my mature experience perfectly. After all, it is such women who make the polite world, wherever we find it; not the world them. Her tact divined, without any motion of mine, all the external points of the case, and made it seem even to me the most natural thing possible that I should have seized the occasion of Mrs. Faulkner's being in Boston to run out with her to my old home, if only for a day, and give my old friends a glimpse of me. She supposed that I must be devoted to the Faulkners for the short time I stayed, and she would merely insist upon my lunching with her; she would make my peace with Mrs. Faulkner. Was not she exquisite? Had I ever met any one just like her? And what a life of self-devotion, and then of sorrow! No, no one could understand what she had been through, unless they had seen something of it day by day. But I had seen something; the most tragical thing of all, perhaps; and my wife had been so good! Mrs. Faulkner had told her about Mrs. March.

The talk naturally confined itself to Mrs. Faulkner

for a time, and it naturally returned to her from whatever excursions it made in other directions. After a while, it began, somehow, to include Nevil, whom I found to be another of my friend's enthusiasms; she celebrated him with the fervour that is rather characteristic of hero-and-heroine worship in small places, where people almost have their noses against the altar. I trembled inwardly for the secret I was guarding, for I felt that my friend would have it out of me in an instant if she suspected me of its custody, but apparently she knew nothing of the engagement. She asked me if I had heard of that horrid affair out West which had given poor Mr. Nevil back to them again; and she said she supposed he would never think of marrying, now. She wished that he would marry Hermia Faulkner; it would be more than appropriate; it would be ideal; they were exactly suited to each other; and she could help him in his work as no other woman could. She deserved some happiness; but it would be like her to go on dedicating her whole existence to the memory of a man who was really her inferior, and who had nothing to commend him to her constancy except his love for her. Of his love for her you could not

say enough; but my friend reminded me that she had never considered him the wonderful person that some people thought him; and she scouted the notion of his having married beneath him in marrying Hermia Winter. Her people were very nice people, though they were so poor; they were idealists; and her father had come West and settled on Pawpaw Creek after the failure of one of those communities in New England, which he had been connected with. As for Hermia herself, whom my friend remembered in her Bell's Institute days, she was a girl of the rarest intelligence and character; a being quite supernally above a ward politician, and a pretentious dilettante like Douglas Faulkner, whose "three times skimmed sky-blue" Virginia blood was full of the barbaric pride of a race of slave-holders. As my friend went on she characterised poor Faulkner with a violent excess which would have satisfied even Mrs. March the day when she first met him at Swampscott, and he betrayed his defective tastes in literature and art. Of course I said that this was exactly the way in which he had impressed my wife; and I defended him. But she told me I might spare my breath; that she knew I really thought just as my

wife and she did about him ; and that if James Nevil had not been a saint upon earth he never could have endured the man.

"We are both saints," I suggested. "I endured him."

"Oh no, you're not. Nevil really loved him, and I believe he loves his memory to this day."

"Well, at any rate Faulkner's out of the story," I urged.

"I'm not so sure of that!" cried my friend. "I'm afraid it's their foolish constancy to him that keeps those two from thinking of each other."

"Are you, really?" I asked, and I found a perverse amusement in playing with her shrewd ignorance so near my knowledge, which it could so easily have penetrated. "It seems to me that if they were inclined to each other, their allegiance to the dead would have very little effect. I suspect that conscience, or the moral sentiments, or whatever we call the supersensuous equipment, has nothing to do with people's falling in love, except to find reasons and justifications for it, and to add a zest to it."

"I will write that to Mrs. March," said my friend, "and ask her if those are her ideas, too."

"Oh, I know!" I answered airily. "You ladies like to pretend that it's an affair of the soul, or if possible, of the intellect; and as your favour is the breath of the novelists' nostrils, they all flatter you up in your pretension, till you get to believing in it yourselves. But at the bottom of your hearts, you know, as *we* do, that it's a plain, earthly affair, for this life, for this trip and train only."

"Shocking! shocking!" said my friend, shaking her head, which had grown charmingly grey, in a marquise manner, and evincing her delight in the boldness with which I handled the matter.

"You may be sure," I concluded, "that if these two people have not fallen in love, it's because they don't fancy each other. If they did, there would be no consideration of sentiment, no air-woven tie of fealty to a love or a friendship of the past which would hold them in the leash. If Faulkner's ghost rose between them, they would plunge through it into each other's arms."

"Ah, now you *are* talking atrociously!" said my friend.

I had indeed been hurried a little beyond myself by a sudden realisation of the fact that so far as

Hermia was concerned, the past was obliterated by her determination to leave everything to Nevil; and that as soon as Nevil knew everything, he would decide, as I should have decided, that every consideration of honour and delicacy and duty, as well as of love, bound him to her. An added impulse had been given to my words by the consciousness that I was the only means of making her determination known to him, that whether she had inspired her mother to ask this service of me or not, she tacitly hoped it, and that in the end I should probably somehow render it.

But I instinctively fought off from it as long as I could, and I resolved to leave town without rendering it if possible. I spent most of the afternoon with my friend; and she sent a late embassy to the Faulkners to know if she might keep me to dinner. They consented, as they must; Hermia herself wrote that she consented only because she was so completely prostrated that she could not hope to see me at dinner, and her mother was not well; they counted upon having me several days with them, and they would not be selfish.

VII.

THE Faulkners of course knew nothing of my intention of going that night, and I stayed rather late after dinner, so that I should not have much more time than I needed to pack my bag and catch my train. I thought that if I could not altogether escape an embarrassing urgence from them to stay longer, I could at least cut it short. But I found that it was a needless precaution when I went back to them. Mrs. Faulkner, the mother, received my reasons for hurrying home with all the acquiescence I could have wished. She said she knew I must be anxious to get back to my family whom I had left at such short notice; that Hermia and herself appreciated my kindness and my wife's goodness more than they could ever express; but they hoped and prayed that if our need should ever be like theirs we might find such friends in it as we had been to them. I felt an unintentional irony in these thanks

so far as they concerned the perfection of my own friendship, but I still had no disposition to repair its lack by offering to see Nevil for her. That, I felt, more and more, I could not do; but I stood a moment, questioning whether I ought not to renew my expressions of regret that I could not do it. I ended by saying that I hoped all would turn out for the best with them; and I added some platitudes and inanities which she seemed not to hear, for she broke in upon them with excuses for Hermia, who would not be able to see me, she was afraid. I said I knew what a wretched day she had been having, and I left my adieux with Mrs. Faulkner for her. Perhaps if I had not myself been so distraught I might have noticed more the incoherent attention Mrs. Faulkner was able to give me throughout this interview. But I did not realise it till afterward. I went to my room, glad to have it over so easily, and resolved to get out of the house with all possible despatch. I had a carriage at the gate, and I looked forward to waiting an hour and a half in the depot before my train started with more pleasure than such a prospect ever inspired in me before.

In the confusion which afterward explained and

justified itself, Mrs. Faulkner had failed to offer me the superfluous help of a servant to fetch down my bag, and I was descending the stairs with it in my hand when I heard a door close in the corridor which led to Faulkner's den. Steps uneven and irregular advanced toward the square hall at the foot of the stairs, and in a moment I saw a man stagger into the light, and stay himself by a clutch at the newel post. He looked around as if dazed, and then vaguely up at me, where I stood as motionless and helpless as he. I have no belief he saw me; but at any rate, Nevil turned at the cry of "James! James!" which came in Hermia's voice from the corridor, and caught her in his arms as she flew upon him. She locked her arms around his neck, and wildly kissed him again and again, with sobs such as break from the ruin of life and love; with gasps like dying, and with a fond, passionate moaning broken by the sound of those fierce, swift kisses.

I pitied her far too much to feel ashamed of my involuntary witness of the scene; though as for that I do not believe she would have foregone one caress if she had known that all the world was looking. I perceived that this was the end; and I

understood as clearly as if I had been told that she had confided her secret to him, had left their fate in his hands, and that he had decided against their love. It maddened me against him, to think he had done that. I did not know, I did not care, what motive, what reason, what scruple had governed him; I felt that there could be only one good in the world, and that was the happiness of that woman. For the moment this happiness seemed centred and existent solely in her possession of him. But I was sensible, through my compassion and my indignation, that whatever he had done, she was admiring, adoring him for it. I saw that in a flash of her upturned face, as I stood, with my heart in my mouth, before the tragedy of their renunciation. The play suddenly ended. With one last long kiss she pushed him from her, and fled back into the corridor.

VIII.

I FOUND myself outside in the night, and at the gate I found Nevil in parley with my coachman, who was explaining to him that he was engaged to take a gentleman inside the house, there, to the depot, and could not carry Nevil home.

"Get in, Mr. Nevil," I said. "I've plenty of time, and can drop you wherever you say."

It was as if we had both just come out of the theatre, and actor and spectator had met on the same footing of the commonplace world of reality.

"Oh, Mr. March!" he said. "Is that you? I *will* drive with you as far as my study, if you'll let me. I don't feel quite able to walk."

"Yes, certainly. Get in."

He gave the direction, "St. Luke's Church," and I followed him into the hack, and he shrank into the corner, and scarcely spoke till we reached the church. By the gleams that the street lamps threw into the windows as we passed them I had glimpses

of his face, haggard and estranged. He tried to fit his latch-key to the door in the church edifice, and then gave it to me, saying, with pathetic feebleness, "You do it. I can't. And don't go—don't leave me," he added, as we entered. "Come in, a moment."

I told the driver to wait, and I suppose he had his conjectures as to the condition in which I was getting the Rev. James Nevil into his study. He was like one drunk, and he went reeling and stumbling before me. Once within he seemed almost unconscious of me, where he sat sunken in an arm-chair, staring at the fire in the grate, and I waited for him to speak. At last I made a movement, and he took it as a sign of departure and put out his hand entreatingly. "No, no! You mustn't go. I want to tell you——" And then he lapsed again into his silence. At last he broke from it with a long sigh: that "Ah-h-h!" which I remembered from the time when he spoke, on the cliffs by the sea, of Faulkner's unkindness to Hermia. "Well, it is ended!"

I had not the heart to pretend that I did not know what he meant. I said nothing, and he lifted his face toward me where I stood, leaning on his chimney-piece.

"Hermia has told me that you know about this unhappiness of ours," he said hoarsely. "Your knowledge makes you the one human being whom I can speak to of it; perhaps it gives you the right to know all—all there is."

"No, no," I protested. "I have no claim, and I haven't the wish." I mechanically referred to my watch, and seeing that I had abundant time before my train went, I dropped into the chair beside the hearth, and ended by saying, "But I should be glad if I could in any way serve you or help you. I do know the painful situation in which you are placed, and though I can truly say that neither my wife nor I have ever tried to know of it, I confess that we have been most deeply interested, and you have both had our sympathy in a measure which I needn't try to express." I instinctively calmed my tone to an effect of quiet upon his agitation.

"You have been very good—far kinder friends than we could have hoped to find, and there is nothing that such friends as you may not know, so far as we are concerned. But there is very little more to tell. It is all over."

I thought he wished me to ask how, and I said,

"Mrs. Faulkner's mother told me this morning that they were waiting to see you—or rather to let you know on your return——"

"Yes. I expected to return to-night, but I came back late this afternoon, and I went directly to them, of course. It was not what Hermia wished—it was what she dreaded most—but it was doubtless for the best; at any rate it happened. In a moment we were confronted with our question. She told me, fully and fearlessly, as she deals with everything, just what it was, and we set ourselves to solve it—to solve it, if possible, in favour of ourselves, our weakness, perhaps our sin!" His head dropped on his breast, and I saw his eyes fixed with a dreary stare on the smouldering fire. I was sensible, without looking about it much, of the character of the room. It was one of those studies which clergymen for their convenience sometimes have in their church buildings, and where I suppose they go to read and write and think, and transact church business with the officers of their church, and receive people who come to them for counsel or comfort in such straits as those which bring us in piteous entreaty before the ministers of conscience. It is a

kind of Protestant confessional; and while I waited for Nevil to speak again, I recalled stories I had heard of guilty souls seeking such an asylum for that relief which we shall all know at the judgment-day, when we shall be stripped bare before the divine compassion down to our inmost thoughts and purposes. Women who have betrayed their husbands go there to own their shame; men that have cheated and stolen and lied go there to lay the burden of their wrong-doing upon the priest of God; and with these a mass of minor sinners, with their peccadilloes of temper and breeding and deceit; as well as the self-accusers who wish to purge their spirits even of the dread of sin, and to receive the acquittal which they cannot give themselves. More and more as Nevil went on it seemed to me that the place was not favourable to a judicial examination of his own case; that the colour of things he had heard there must stain and blacken the facts of his own experience, and prevent him from seeing them aright.

"The question was," he said, lifting his head, and bending that hopeless stare on me, "not what we should do, with that shadow of Faulkner's dream

hanging over us, but what we *had* done—what *I* had done—to cause him the torment of such a dream."

"For Heaven's sake, Mr. Nevil," I broke in, "don't take that way of looking at it. You had no more to do with causing that dream than I had. The pain he suffered—the physical pain—caused the craze which his dream came from. It was a somnambulic mania—nothing more and nothing less. Dr. Wingate assured Mrs. Faulkner in the most solemn manner——"

"Ah, the sincerity of a doctor with his patient! He is a skilful man, very able, very learned; he knows all about the body, but the soul and its secrets are beyond science. There are facts in the case that he has never had before him. I knew Hermia first, in the loveliness of her young girlhood, and I brought her and Faulkner together."

I murmured, "Yes, I remember you told me."

"I saw the impression she instantly made upon him: it was love at first sight. But though the love of her had possessed his whole soul, he was first faithful to his friendship with me. In that childlike, simple, cordial truthfulness of his, which no one ever knew so fully as I, and which I shall

never see in any other man, he pressed me to tell him whether I had any feeling for her myself, for then he would go away, and live his passion down, as best he could, and leave her to me. I assured him that I had no such feeling, no feeling but that pleasure in her beauty and goodness which every one must have in her presence, and—they were married."

The silence following upon the gasp in which these words ended was not such as I could break. After a moment Nevil went on—

"I believed what I said; I have never doubted it till this day. But—how do I know—how do I know—that I was not in love with her then, that I have not always been in love with her through all his life and death? It is such a subtle, such a fatal thing in its perversion! I have seen it in others; why shouldn't it be in me? Why shouldn't we have been playing a part unknowingly to ourselves, hypocrites before our own souls? Why should I ever have consented to be with them, to qualify their home by an alien presence, through the daily, hourly lie of friendship for him, except that I loved her, and longed to be near her? Why could not I

have kept the love of that poor, foolish young girl, innocent and harmless, for all her levity, which she gave me out there in the West, except that in the guilty inmost of my heart there was no room for anything but love for my friend's wife, whom it had made his widow? Why——"

"Hold on! Wait! This is monstrous!" I broke in upon him. "It's atrocious. You're the victim of your own morbid introspection, of a kind of self-analysis that never ends in anything but self-conviction. I know what it is, every one knows; and it's your right, it's your duty as a man to stand out against it, and not let the honest and lawful feeling you now have damn the past to shame!"

I spoke vehemently, far beyond any explicit right I had to adjure him, but I could see that my words had not the slightest weight with him.

"And Hermia," he went on, "why should she have cared nothing for Faulkner at first? Why, when she believed she had schooled herself to love him, should she have suffered the ever-repeated intrusion of my presence in her home? Why should she have refused so long to know what his dream was? Why should we have made such haste to

separate after Faulkner's death, and then why should my thoughts have turned so instantly to her, with such longing for her pity, in that shame I underwent, and why should she have honoured and not despised me for a misfortune that my own folly had provoked? There is one answer to it all!"

"And the answer is that your view of the case is as purely an aberration as Faulkner's dream."

"Ah, you can't account for everything on the ground of madness! Somewhere, some time, there *must* be responsibility for wrong."

"Even if we have to find it in innocence! I tell you that your view of the situation is as false as that which the lowest scandal-mongering mind of an enemy could take of it. You are bound to let your own character—or if not your character, then her character, her nature—count for something in making up such a judgment. I will leave you out of the question, if you like, but I would stake my life upon the singleness of her devotion in thought, feeling, and deed to that wretched man whose misery seems such an inextinguishable poison. It's preposterous that I should be defending her to you; but if you have suffered her to share these misgivings of yours, I say

you've done a cruel thing. I know—her mother told me—that after what she underwent from learning just what Faulkner's dream was—and my wife and I saw something of her suffering, both in Boston and on the way out here——"

"Ah—h—h!" he breathed.

"She had found peace in her reliance, her perfect faith in your conscience, in your sense of justice, and your instinct of right; and, if you will allow me to say so, you were most sacredly bound not to let any perverse scruple, any self-indulgent misgiving, betray her trust in you. You are a man, with a man's larger outlook, and you should have been the perspective in which she could see the whole matter truly. If you have failed her in this you have been guilty of something worse than anything you accuse yourself of. Take the thing at its worst! I refuse to consider that she ever allowed her fancy to stray from her duty, but suppose that you *were* in love with her, in that unconscious way you imagine: who was hurt, who was deceived by it? What harm was done? I will go farther, and ask what harm was there, even if you knew you were in love with her? You let no one else know it—her, least of any."

The words, when I had got them out, shocked me; they certainly did not represent my own feeling about such a situation; I was glad my wife had not heard them; and I saw the horror of me that came into Nevil's face. I felt myself getting hot and red, and I hastened to add, "You will forgive me, if I try to put before you the mere legal, practical, matter-of-fact view of the affair," and I could not help remembering that it was also the romantic view, which I had found celebrated in many novels as something peculiarly fine and noble and high, something heroic in the silently suffering lover. "I admit that I have no right to speak to you at all——"

"Go on; I invite you to speak," he said gently.

"Then I will say that my only desire is to—to—how shall I say it?—urge that this is altogether an affair of the future, and that if you allow the unhappy past, which is dead, and ought to be buried with Faulkner, to dominate you, or to shape your relations, you seem to me to be——"

I found myself talking sophistries, and I had nothing to say when he took up the word where I broke off.

"Recognising the fact that the future is the creature, the mere consequence of the past! Without what has been, nothing can be. Oh, we have looked at it in every light! At first, when she told me, I was as bold, as defiant, as a man can be who finds himself unjustly defamed. I said that if ever we had felt reluctance or doubt in our allegiance to the dead, now it was our right, our duty, to feel none. We should accuse ourselves if we admitted that any accusal could lie against us. The very innocence of our lives demanded vindication; we should be recreant to our good consciences if we did not treat that wretched figment of a dreaming craze as it deserved. For a moment—for an hour—we were happy in the escape which my defiance won for us, and we built that future without a past which you think can stand. It fell to ruin. We had deceived each other, but the deceit could not last. Our very indignation at the treason imputed to us by Faulkner's dream made us examine our hearts, and question each other. We could not tell when our love began, and that mystery of origin which love partakes of with eternity, and which makes it seem so divine a thing, became a witness against us. We

said that if we could not make sure that no thought we had ever had of each other in his lifetime was false to him, then we were guilty of all, and we must part."

"Oh," I groaned out, "what mere madness of the moon!"

"It was not I who pronounced our sentence; she saw herself that it must be so; it was she who sent me from her."

"Yes; only a woman could be capable of it, could be such a moral hypochondriac! But if she sent you away, and you know, as you must know, that in her heart she wished you to stay, why not in Heaven's name go back to her?"

"Ah, you think I didn't go back! You think we parted once only! We parted a hundred times!"

"But," I said, "you will see it all differently to-morrow, and you must go back to her, and whether she bids you go or not, you must never leave her."

"And what sort of life would that be? A life of defiance, of recklessness, a mere futureless present! I am a priest of the Church, and I teach submission, renunciation, abnegation, here below, where there can be no true happiness, for the sake of a blessed

eternity. Shall I cleave to this love which we feel cannot innocently be ours, and preach those things with my lying tongue, while my life preaches rebellion, indulgence, self-will? Every breath I drew would be hypocrisy. What heart should I have to counsel or admonish others in temptation, when I was all rotten within myself? What——"

"Ah, but only listen a moment! This would be all well enough if you were guilty of what you accuse yourself of! But don't you see that in this reasoning, or this raving, of yours, you have violated the very first principle, the very highest principle of law? You have held yourself guilty till you were proven innocent, and you offer no proof that you are guilty, not the least proof in the world. You are only *afraid* that you are guilty; it amounts to that, and it amounts to nothing more; for I hold that Faulkner's crazy jealousy forms no manner of case against you. I confess that though I may have seemed to imply the contrary, I should not feel it lawful for you to marry his widow if you had ever allowed yourself to covet his wife. But you never did; the very notion of such a thing fills you with such shame and horror that you accuse

yourself of it. I know that kind of infernal juggle of the morbid conscience; but I thank Heaven I have my own conscience in such good training now that it accuses me of nothing I haven't done: it finds it has quite enough to do in dealing with the facts; I don't supply it with any fancies! It ought to be on your conscience not to leave that noble and beautiful creature to be the prey of doubts and fears, of ifs and ans, that will blast her whole life with the shame of a thief who has given up his booty to escape punishment! Suppose you look at that side of it! You say you left her because she bade you, but she bade you only because she knew you believed you ought to go; and now you must go back to her not only for her sake and for your sake, but in the interest of human enlightenment, from the duty every educated man has to resist the powers of darkness that work upon our nerves through the superstitions of the childhood of the world. You not only ought not to let Faulkner's dream have any deterrent influence with you, but as you saw yourself, exactly and entirely because of his dream, you ought to act in defiance of it, if you have the good conscience which you 've said nothing yet to prove you haven't."

I saw that I had touched some points that had escaped him; we talked a long time, and at last I pulled out my watch in a scare, lest I had overstayed my time. I jumped to my feet. "Good heavens! I've lost my train!"

Nevil looked at his watch. "You have Eastern time; there's nearly a whole hour yet. I'll go to the station with you."

I would not sit down again. "Suppose, then, we let the driver take my bag, and we walk? We can talk better."

"You are very good," he said; "I should like that."

The night was dark, and we had the seclusion of a room for our talk as we walked along together, and in the vast depot, starred with its gas jets far overhead, there was an unbroken sense of communion. Long before we parted Nevil had consented to revise his own conclusions, and so far to take my view of the situation, as at least to see Hermia again, and lay it before her.

My spirits rose with my success, and I set myself to cheer the melancholy in which he assented to my urgence. I understood afterward that he was yield-

ing to reason against that perverse and curious apparatus which we call the conscience: and I perceived that he was loath to have me leave him, as if he were afraid to be left alone, or wished to be still farther convinced. He followed me into the sleeping-car, and there he fell into the hands of that rich and cordial parishioner of his whom I remembered meeting when I went down to the steamer at East Boston to see Nevil off for Europe. The gentleman recalled himself to my recollection, and rejoiced that we were to be fellow-travellers as far as Albany.

Nevil could not hide his disappointment and vexation from me, though his parishioner did not see it. He made us both light cigars with him in the smoking-room, and he talked us silent.

The car began to move, and I said, "Well, good-bye," and followed Nevil out upon the platform for a last word. "Remember your promise! Better get off!"

"Oh, I sha'n't forget that. If I live, I will see her again, and tell her all you have said. And I thank you—thank you——" Clinging to my hand, he pressed it hard, and stepped backward from the car to the ground. I saw him look up at me and then

he gave a wild cry, and I could feel the car grinding him up against the stone jamb of the archway through which the train was passing. There was a hideous crashing sound from his body, and I jumped at the bell rope. The train stopped; Nevil stood upright, with his face turned toward the light, and a strange effect of patience in his attitude. When the train slowly backed and set him free, he dropped forward a crushed and lifeless lump.

IX.

HERMIA died a year later, and was buried by Faulkner's side; his mother lived on for several years.

It was inevitable, of course, that Hermia should accept Nevil's death as a judgment; we become so bewildered before the mere meaninglessness of events at times, that it is a relief to believe in a cruel and unjust providence rather than in none at all. What is probably true is that she sank under the strain of experiences that wrung the finest and most sensitive principles of her being, or, as we say, died of a broken heart.

My wife and I have often talked of her and Nevil, and have tried to see some way for them out of the shadow of Faulkner's dream into a sunny and happy life. As they are both dead, we have dealt with them as arbitrarily as with the personages in a fiction, and have placed and replaced them at our

pleasure in the game, which they played so disastrously, so that we could bring it to a fortunate close for them. We have always denied, in the interest of common-sense and common justice, any controlling effect to the dream itself, except through their own morbid conscientiousness, their exaggerated sensibility. We know people, plenty of them, who would have been no more restrained from each other by it than by a cobweb across their path: Hermias who would never have told their Nevils of it, Nevils who, if they had known it, would have charged their Hermias on their love to spurn and trample upon it. That evil dream had power upon the hapless pair who succumbed to it only because they were so wholly guiltless of the evil imputed to them.

Our Nevil's death, violent and purely accidental as it was, seemed to us a most vague and inconclusive catastrophe, and no true solution of the problem. Yet our Hermia being what she was, and Nevil being Nevil, we saw that it was impossible Faulkner's dream should not have always had power upon them; and the time came when we could regard their death without regret. I myself think

that if Nevil had seen Hermia again, as he promised me, it would have been only to renew in her and in himself their strength for renunciation; and I have sometimes imagined a sort of dramatic friendship taking the place of their love, and uniting their lives in good works, or something of that kind. But I have not been satisfied with this conception; it is too like what I have found carried out in some very romantic novels; and my wife has always insisted that if they had met again, they would have married and been unhappy. She insists that they could not have kept their self-respect and their perfect honour for each other if they had married. But this again seems abominably unfair: that they should suffer so for no wrong; unless, indeed, all suffering is to some end unknown to the sufferer or the witnesses, and no anguish is wasted, as that friend of Nevil's believed. We must come to some such conclusion, or else we must go back to a cruder theory, and say that they were all three destined to undergo what they underwent, and that what happened to them was not retribution, not penalty in any wise, since no wrong had been done, but simply fate.

Of course there is always the human possibility

that the dream was a divination of facts; that Hermia and Nevil were really in love while Faulkner lived, and were untrue to him in their hearts, which are the fountains of potential good and evil; but knowing them to be what they were, we have never admitted this hypothesis for a moment. For any one to do so, my wife says, would be to confess himself worse than Faulkner dreamed them to be. She does not permit it to be said, or even suggested, that our feelings are not at our bidding, and that there is no sin where there has been no sinning.

THE END.

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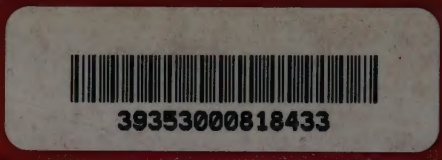
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